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KING'S BAYNARD.

BY

THE HON. MRS. GEORGE GIFFORD.

" Mine honour is my life ; both grow in one ;
Take honour from me, and my life is done :
Then, dear my liege, mine honour let me try ;
In that I live, and for that I will die."—SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

L O N D O N :
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1866.

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CHAPTER I.

“Let the eagle change his plume,
The leaf its hue, the flower its bloom ;
But ties around his heart were spun,
That could not, would not, be undone !”—CAMPBELL.

IT has been said by a great master of fiction, that “such things,” speaking of great sorrows, “are sacred and secret,” and it doubtless behoves us to draw a veil over such scenes, which are enacted daily, but with one witness, the eye of an all-merciful God—the only eye which the shrinking human heart, laid bare by a fresh wound, can bear upon its agony and live.

As far as Ninon's great sorrow was publicly witnessed, I have felt bound to describe it to the reader, but over the threshold of that closed door, it is not either for me or for him to step ; it is enough for us to know that there was one tender loving heart at hand, and that the true Trevylian nature was not likely to desert a friend, in the hour of her bitterest need.

Mr. Baynard was sent for by a party of urgent adherents, and it was with a sore heart and a presentiment of evil to come, which he could not subdue, that he yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and followed them to the scene of his triumph like a man who walks in his sleep.

Once on the arena, however, where so many stout hearts fail, and so many ready tongues wax dumb, he roused himself to address the electors, and, in a few words, which he was allowed to utter without a single interruption or remark, and which

were manly, honest, and to the point, he thanked them for "the distinguished honour they had conferred on one so young, so untried, and, excepting for the favour he had been able to find in their eyes, during a short residence among them, so undeserving as himself."

"But," he added, and his voice faltered, and his eye moistened as he spoke, "we have a tribute of respect to pay to one, who, opposed to us in politics, has ever been one with us in heart; to a great man, taken from amongst us, in the zenith and the pride of his reputation. Gentlemen, our triumph is sadly clouded, and, as a favour, I must beg of you to avoid all demonstration of rejoicing on the occasion, which would under other circumstances, have been the happiest, as well as the proudest of my life. While Mr. Vavasour's wife, or I should say now," he added in solemn, faltering accents, "Mr. Vavasour's

widow whom we have so lately seen radiant in youth and beauty amongst us—remains in this town, need I suggest to you the indecency, nay, the barbarity, of any popular demonstration on the side of the party which I am proud to call my own.”

A low murmur of assent, which would have been a cheer but for the words just spoken, betokened how deeply the news thus conveyed of the actual decease of the member of whom his friends and constituents were so justly proud, and for whom his political enemies entertained deep personal respect, sank into the hearts of the people.

There remained no doubt as to the result of the election, which was a complete triumph for the Tory side; but the feelings which were uppermost in “young John’s” mind, as he rode sadly back to King’s Baynard late in the evening, were not such as might have been supposed

likely to agitate the breast of the successful candidate.

He had had an interview with Mary, who, anxious for her Uucle's sake, gave him many parting injunctions with respect to the way in which the bad news was to be communicated to him, in the least startling manner possible; and he also had had injunctions to lay upon her, and many a fond word of solicitude to add, regarding the dismal night watch to be spent at the side of her friend, who still appeared to be paralysed under her load of overwhelming grief.

In the quaint old-fashioned inn parlour the interview took place, and it would have saddened any chance spectator to see the grave, harassed look of the two young faces, which had been so cloudless and sunny but a few short hours before. Mary was the first to perceive the expediency of shortening

the precious moments which remained for them to spend in one another's society.

"My Uncle will be anxious," she said, "and I fear I must send you away. Do not fear for me, John. I shall not shrink from my task of love. Aunt Dorothy will come to me, to-morrow, and we must divide ourselves between Uncle Gilbert and Mrs. Vavasour, while you are away."

"Good-bye, and God speed you!" she added suddenly, and, at the same time, presenting her innocent cheek to him for a caress. She did not wish him to perceive that her courage was failing, and her boasted strength giving way; but that impulsive action revealed the secret to him, better than words could have done; and the bitterest moment that he had ever known, was the one in which he lost sight of the floating white draperies, which, like those of some beneficent spirit, hovered for a moment

in the dim light of the staircase, and the next, had vanished in darkness out of sight. He returned for a moment to the room which they had just left, he could not trust himself to the gaze of the bar, until he had resumed the self-command which had completely deserted him. On the floor lay something which she had dropped, which proved to be the blue breast-knot which Mary had worn so exultingly over her loyal heart that day.

“Another talisman,” he muttered to himself, and he carefully placed the pretty badge in the breast of his own coat. “God grant, my darling, that it may be one of good omen for us both !”

With these words on his lips, and heaving a deep sigh, he left the room, and passed through the long draughty corridor, where he had once stood, waiting to receive the beautiful bride, on the night of her first appearance in the county, at the

Elminster ball—the night when Margaret Town-Eden had experienced on her account the first bitter pangs of jealousy and doubt. How many a tale of life and death could the walls of an old country inn reveal, were they suddenly to be endowed with the gift of communicating all that they had ever witnessed of the vicissitudes of human fate.

Mr. Baynard having mounted his horse, put him into a sharp trot, and did not draw rein, or slacken his pace, until he arrived at the Rectory gate. He was anxious to relieve the anxiety of the old man with regard to the safety of his niece, and anxious, also, to get over the sad communication which he had to make, and of which he greatly dreaded the effect on his shattered nerves.

The Rector of King's Baynard was sleeping peacefully in his arm-chair, as his "dear lad" entered the room, the bearer of melancholy tidings. The latter paused

for a moment to contemplate the picture thus presented, and he could scarcely realise to himself that the events which had followed so quickly on one another, and which it has taken so many pages to describe, had actually occurred since the morning on which he and Mary had left him so anxious for the turn of events, which now seemed of comparative insignificance in the eyes on which things of greater moment had since dawned. As the old man gradually resumed consciousness, which is the way in which the old awake, he feebly lifted his head, and fixed his eyes upon the sorrowful countenance of "young John," who wished, in this instance, to let his face prove the herald of his news—

"E'en such a man

Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night,
And would have told him half his Troy was burned;
But Priam found the fire, ere he his tongue—"

and Mr. Trevelylian's first words were "I see it all, dear lad, you have lost the election."

"I wish I had if that had been all, Sir; but I have done worse, I have lost a friend. It is of no use trying to break things" he added, as he saw the alarmed look in the old man's eyes, which told more plainly than words, that the shadow of the curse was stealing over him again. "I had better tell you at once, that Mr. Vavasour had a fit on the hustings to-day—that he never spoke again—but, in fact, died on the spot, and Mary is with Mrs. Vavasour in the town now. She will not, of course, be able to return to-night, but she sent her love to you, Sir, and made me promise to remain here, if such should be your wish."

"Thank God, if that is all!" was the fervent ejaculation of the old man, to whom life and death were now indeed one and the same thing; and for whom

the vicissitudes of fate had lost their sting, unless they affected the only two beings on earth who could keep the smouldering ashes of affection alive in his breast.

“I thought something might have happened to Mabel.”

“To Mary, you mean, Sir,” answered “young John,” with a trace of impatience in his voice. He had just returned from witnessing an awful sorrow, and it jarred upon him, to hear the exclamation of “Thank God,” with reference to the blow which had fallen upon the poor crushed head. He forgot to make allowance for what we call the selfishness and the apathy of age; to talk of which, appears to me, however, like talking of the irregularity of a watch, whose mainspring has been broken long ago. It was, to my mind, a proof of the tenacity of affection in Mr. Trevylian’s nature, that

in its living death it clung fondly to the old ties still.

In reply to "young John's" correction, he said, "To Mary I mean, of course. It is a sad scene for her to witness, poor child ! She cannot be of any use, and will do herself harm. I had better send the carriage for her," he added, stretching out his hand towards the silver bell at his side.

"No; we must not send for her, she would not leave her friend in her sorrow; but if I can be of any use or comfort to you, I will defer my journey to Paris for a week."

"Do so, dear lad; do not leave us now; but you must not defer it long, for I must see you and my darling, man and wife, before I die."

"You shall do so, please God ! It is my one hope and object in life. But it is due to Mary that I should go on this hateful errand first."

“Then go to-morrow, as you proposed. It is your duty to lose no time, your duty both to Mary and to me.”

These words were uttered in a rapid, excited way, so foreign to Mr. Trevylian's usual manner, that “young John” looked up surprised into his Mentor's face; and he replied with a dignity which had a touch of sadness in its tones: “I hope you do not think that I would knowingly fail in either. You do not know what this proof of it is costing me. Is it nothing to me, Sir, do you think,” he added, while the blood came painfully, and as it were, drop by drop, into his hitherto pale cheek, “to go to a man like my father, to ask him to give me proof of the purity of my mother?”

“Forgive me, dear lad, forgive me!” pleaded the old man, down whose cheeks the tears were rolling fast, “I well know what it must cost you. I, who have had the

same doubts on the score of my lost child, have reason to feel for you in this case. But take heart, you have every reason to hope, while I had but too good cause for fear. I do not believe you will find that the breath of slander ever touched your mother's name."

"Young John's" head drooped upon his breast, his breath came heavily, and with an effort, while the veins were like cords in his forehead, as he said slowly and deliberately in answer to this remark "For my soul's sake, I trust not; for I do not hold myself responsible for any consequences, if I am what I have been called to-day."

It was true. Amongst the surging of the crowds who had cheered him so vociferously for his gallant act, had floated one word of bitter import, which as applied to himself had chilled the marrow in his bones, and frozen the life-blood in his

heart, for it was a word which implied disinheritance and disgrace to himself, and which heaped shame upon the memory of his dead mother, for whose purity he would have answered with his own life.

The after events of that momentous day had indeed for a time numbed the sting which that bitter word had left, but it began to rankle again on his solitary ride home in the evening, and had swelled into uncontrollable anguish under the unintentional probe of the old man's words. It was not that he believed it *possible* that the word was true, but to susceptible natures like his, where honour is concerned, the breath of slander has a tarnishing, and even a corroding effect. Fortunately for him, he had at that moment much to occupy him. He had to think of, and for Mary, in the trial that had come to her in her friend's bitter sorrow. He had to think of the effect her prolonged absence might

have upon his aged friend and more than father; and he had to think of the new duties which the result of the election would impose upon him. But still, as he went home to King's Baynard, on that lovely spring night (Mr. Trevelyian having declined his offer of remaining with him) above all these thoughts, momentous and all-engrossing as they would otherwise have been, floated the *word* of evil omen, which contained the key to the ruin of his dearest hopes, and which had the power of turning the flood of evil upon the bright destiny which seemed opening for him on every side.

The deep passionate words which had fallen from his lips in reference to it, had startled Mr. Trevelyian when he heard them, as a horse might be startled at the sudden roll of a drum. "I am responsible for no consequences, if I am what I have been called to-day."

CHAPTER II.

“Nay a mother;

Why not a mother? When I said a mother,
Methought you saw a serpent. What’s in mother
That you start at it?”—ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

A FEW days after the election, when the reaction of stagnation was beginning to take the place of the fever, turmoil, and auguish of the scenes attendant on it, Mr. Baynard found himself under his father’s roof at Paris, certainly an unbidden, and as he doubted not, an unwelcome guest. He was, however, fully bent upon ascertaining, from authentic sources, one or two points in which his own honour

was deeply implicated, and which he felt it his imperative duty to have cleared up before his marriage with Mary Trevylian took place; an event for which he longed with a lover's ardour, and to which she had consented, as we have seen, on the evening preceding the dark day, which had closed in sorrow on so many with whom this tale has been concerned.

A great change had the events of those few days wrought on "young John." It would have been difficult to have traced in that grave determined countenance, overshadowed, if not yet lined by thought, the genial *bonhomme* and careless gaiety of expression which had so lately been its distinguishing characteristics. It was not, however, the weight of his new honours, or the effect of the two letters now to be attached to his name, however magical in their influence, or great their mystic power over the souls of men, that had fallen like a

shadow upon his life, in the very tide of his outward success ; and which, whether it would spread and darken, and wrap him in its folds like a toil, or whether it would disperse and vanish into thin air, it was now the question of a few hours to decide.

The dark evil brows of Luke Grimstone lowered upon the heir of King's Baynard, as he encountered him face to face on his way to Sir Marmaduke's room, whither he was conducted by a foreign lacquey, to whom the person, as well as the name of Mr. Baynard, were alike unfamiliar.

“ Sir Marmaduke cannot be disturbed,” Mr. Grimstone said, with an air of insulting arrogance, and addressing himself to the son of the man whom though he served, he scorned to call *master*. “ You will enter that door at your peril Mr. John, and on your own responsibility. Any sudden surprise might cost him his life.”

The eyes of the young man flashed angrily, and his lips were parted to reply to the insolent menace; but as though upon second thoughts he had decided that words were too good to be bestowed upon one, whom from the depth of his soul he despised, he turned suddenly upon his heel with an altered purpose, and addressing himself to the foreign servant, he requested to be shown to an apartment in which he could wait until such time as it should be Sir Marmaduke's pleasure to receive him. At the same time, he observed aloud for Mr. Grimstone's benefit, without looking at or even turning towards him, "That can scarcely be called a 'surprise,' which must have been expected for the last three days. I suppose Sir Marmaduke's letters are not tampered with."

Mr. Grimstone vouchsafed no reply to this home thrust; while the active Frenchman was grimacing and bowing at a door

which he had flung open, saying as he did so. “*Entrez, Monsieur, miladi est chez elle.*”

The man was her ladyship's own body servant, and seeing that “Monsieur” was young and handsome as an Apollo, he did not doubt that such a visitor would be welcome there. At all events, had he had private instructions to that effect, he could not have been more obsequious, or more ready with his welcome.

As “young John” entered the luxuriously furnished boudoir, almost mechanically, (for his stepmother's was scarcely the presence which he would voluntarily have sought at that moment) he gave a hasty glance round the room, and ascertained to his great relief that Lady Baynard was not in it. It is true that her companionship would have been a shade less hateful to him, than that of the man who had never from the time he could

first call his lowering features to mind, failed to goad him almost beyond the limits of his self-control. As a child, indeed, of five or six years old, he had in a fit of ungovernable passion, which the villain had done his best to provoke, struck Luke Grimstone a blow with some child's toy which he held in his clenched fist—it cut his lip open, and left a deep scar; a mark for the remainder of his life. That blow had rankled in his revengeful heart like slow poison in corrupted veins, and there was no fate however dark, no torture however cruel, or long drawn out, to which the valet would not have condemned his master's son, always provided that he could have struck assassin-like in the dark, or from behind.

To rid himself of his hateful presence, “young John” had entered Lady Baynard's boudoir, to which he had been invited by the gesticulating Frenchman; and after

ascertaining that it was empty, with a sigh of relief he walked to the window, a man's never failing resource when there is no fire, or available mantelpiece in the room, before which to lounge away the time devoted to the most dreary of all processes that of *waiting*. It was an especially irksome interval to the young heir and his reflections under the circumstances were gloomy enough.

Fate never looks well under too close a scrutiny. Face to face, and hand to hand, she assumes her most terrible aspect, and the fairy visions that have sprung up like mushrooms in our path, while she is still a long way off, fall like dead leaves from a blasted tree, when we feel her breath warm upon our cheek, when there is but a step between us and her out-stretched hand. Upon what will that hand uncloset? When the momentous question becomes a thing for immediate solution, the stoutest

heart might well quail and the keenest eye grow dim; and as "young John" stood at the window, gazing out into the narrow streets, looking at the unfamiliar sights, and listening to the unfamiliar sounds, of a foreign city, with his destiny advancing towards him swiftly through the dim torchlight of doubt, he thought that he heard again the utterance that had become familiar to him at the old house at King's Baynard "Ah! Sir Mark! Sir Mark!" while a soft touch which was laid upon his hand at the same moment, made him start in a manner which would have astonished the hard riding men of Deresfordshire, who had seen him take the demon leap, which had earned for himself, and for Orion, a never dying renown.

The touch, however, in this instance was a mortal one, although for its innocence and purity it might have been the touch of

an angel. Standing on a couch at his side was a very young child of uncommon and wonderful beauty, whose large dark eyes were fixed upon his face, and whose soft dimpled hand, was half shyly, half confidently inserting itself into his own. That child was his father's son : the Marmaduke Baynard whose very existence "young John" had almost forgotten, and whom he had never heard mentioned but once in his life. On that occasion, the reader will, perhaps, remember the stress that was laid by the attorney upon the christian name bestowed upon the infant. "They have christened him Marmaduke, the family name," he had observed sententially ; but the remark made no farther impression upon the heir to whom it was addressed, and he had never again thought of the child, either as a rival or as a brother, about whose tender head had been woven many a dark plot

for the destruction of his own fortunes.

There was an appeal in the wondering innocent eyes, and in the caressing action of the little one, which spoke to the heart of the elder brother (ever open to generous impulses) at once, and stooping down, he lifted him tenderly in his arms, while a tear that had a very pure source, glittered for a moment in his eyes, over which care had thrown a shadow of late, too deep for that well-spring which is the fountain of emotion, but on which sorrow, in the stern acceptance of the word, sets a hard and relentless seal.

“Your’s is the first welcome home I have ever received,” he said; “I will take it as a good omen for Mary, and for myself.”

As he said the words, the child leapt in his arms in the joy of his heart, and then relapsing suddenly into seriousness, he gazed earnestly into his brother’s eyes for a

moment ; after which, as if satisfied with the expression he read in them, he passed his hand over his cheek, with the natural grace and fondness of a baby caress. It was a sight that might have touched the heart of the most careless or indifferent observer, and it so happened that it was witnessed in secret by one who was neither the one nor the other ; by one who had been the bitterest foe that the elder brother had ever known—by one whose wild stormy nature was open to impressions, whether of evil or of good, and whose heart went out with a fierce bound towards the man whose downfall and ruin she had done her worst to achieve.

Carlotta, Lady Baynard, was the witness of that interview between the rival brothers ; and touched to the quick through the maternal instinct, which can turn for the time being very dross into

virgin ore, she registered a solemn vow in her secret heart, that the evil which since the birth of her own son it had been her life's aim to achieve, it should henceforth be her determined purpose to neutralize and undo.

Alas ! for the sake of human destiny, *evil* is a force easily put in motion, and like other great forces entirely beyond the control of any hand, when the wheels of its machinery are once at work. Lady Baynard had not hesitated to touch the springs which moved it, and it was of little avail then, that she repented of having done so, and registered that solemn resolve. They were steadily and surely at work, and at the very moment when the hearts of the brothers had gone out towards one another, under the influence of the touch which wrings the master-chord of life with its subtle and unerring finger, the clanking of the loom might have

been heard, which was weaving a strong web round the destiny of the elder of the two.

Lady Baynard was a woman of fierce impulses and of strong instincts. The master-chord in her nature, was the love which she shared with Sir Marmaduke for the child of his old age; and from the moment in which she saw that child in his elder brother's caressing arms, the hatred which she had cherished for "the heir" died within her, and in its place sprang up a warm grateful impulse, which in a woman of her fiery nature, was very much akin to love. Heedless of the discovery which must ensue of the position which she had occupied as a spy in her own house—a spy upon the actions of one whom she had purposely caught in this trap, believing that her hate would have been inflamed by some word of dislike, or even by a hasty rebuff, directed towards

the innocent child—she flung back the curtain behind which she had not been ashamed to conceal herself, and advancing towards her step-son with her arms extended, said—

“ So, my Marmaduke loves his brother. Let it be a sign that the past is forgotten. Let me welcome my son to his father's roof.”

The words were spoken in the accents of her own soft tongue; the gesture which accompanied them was graceful—nay, even tender, and the heart of the young man stirred within him. The strings had been touched which thrilled alike two natures, opposite as the poles; and two bitter enemies stood face to face, without one bitter thought of enmity between them to cancel the meaning of the greeting, which had almost amounted to a caress on the part of the woman, from whose very touch the young man

would have shrunk, as from contamination, but an hour ago, with the fragrance of the recollection of his pure love clinging round him like a talisman from the suspicion of ill. Innocence had worked the spell which had softened his heart towards his step-mother, in this instance. The child was between them, as she clasped her hands over the brotherly arm which folded him, in its strong embrace ; and as she did so, the true womanly action, and the sanctity of the maternal tie, raised up a feeling of chivalry, (I can scarcely call it respect) in "young John's" mind for Lady Baynard, which would not have been won from him by her most subtle wiles in the days of her marvellous power over the hearts of men ; before the beautiful mask under which evil itself appeared refined and seductive, had let the light of time through its chinks to shew but the desolated wreck of the power that

had once had strength to move a world.

I doubt whether such a tribute had ever been paid to the "Syren of the South," in the zenith of her youth and fame, as that which she won at that moment from an honest heart in the day of her "sere and yellow leaf," when she was old, faded, and worse than all, *forgotten* by the very slaves whom she had once led captive in the wake of her chariot wheels.

"I thank you for your welcome, Madam," he answered, in her own tongue, "and for that of this pretty little one; he has not, I find, been taught to hate me."

"Not so, not so," replied the mother, quickly.

It was not, as a rule, at all hard to Lady Baynard to lie, but this one lie smote home to the seared conscience with a stab of pain. He had not been taught in words to hate his brother, but his very

existence had been made the tool of hate, too deep for words; of the silent hate which works underground, which kills, but makes no outward sign. She advanced, as she spoke, to take the child in her own arms, and as she looked up at him with a tender expression in her large luminous eyes, there was something in the look, in the attitude, which brought Ninon vividly to Mr. Baynard's recollection.

He was, perhaps, the only person in Derefordshire, who was unaware of the relationship existing between Mrs. Vavasour, and his step-mother, a fact which had been widely circulated through the agency of Mr. Nathaniel Lines; but which, in accordance with the rule of reticence, with regard to his family, maintained by all who approached the heir, no one had either mentioned or commented upon to him.

When I said the only person, I was not

including his second self, Mary Trevylian, or even her Uncle, the Rector of King's Baynard. They had lived apart from the Derefordshire world, since the time when the mysteries of the two houses of Baynard, and Vavasour, had occupied the thoughts, or at least the tongues of its gossips; and they were as ignorant as "young John" himself, on the subject of Ninon's parentage and history.

It was not surprising that the likeness should have struck him then, for it was a very remarkable one, especially in Lady Baynard's softened maternal mood.

"You will be good to my darling, to your little brother, will you not?" she said, addressing the once hated heir, and passionately caressing the child, whose glossy dark curls were now nestling lovingly in her own bosom; "you will be good to him, I know."

These words were added with an ex-

pression of appeal both in the eyes and in the voice of the relentless woman, whose hand had stabbed at that brother's life in the dark, and who believed that it was in her own power, to fashion his destiny at her will. He might have appealed to her with such a look and in such tones, but a few hours before, and it might not have been then too late.

CHAPTER III.

“What need a man forestall his date of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid.”

MILTON.

“SIR MARMADUKE will see you now.”

These words were addressed insolently enough by Luke Grimstone to the heir of King's Baynard, without the addition of any name, or the respectful deference of manner due to his master's son, from one nominally occupying the position of a servant in that house. The words sounded ominously in “young John's” ears, for they summoned him to the interview so long dreaded, with one who had never acted a father's part to-

wards, him and which would entail consequences of vital importance to himself, and to the young trusting girl, whose heart would be stabbed with two-fold bitterness in any trouble that should fall upon his head.

His step-mother, Lady Baynard, was still in the room with her child nestled to sleep in her arms ; and as Luke Grimstone stood in the doorway after delivering his ungracious message, she made him a hasty private signal inviting him to approach her, to which, however, this man whose insolence was unbounded, was wilfully blind. Without heeding it, he turned to follow the heir whose ignorance of the geography of the house, rendered abortive the plan which he had formed of gaining his father's presence, before the valet had time to force himself upon him, under the excuse of showing him the way.

“ You must condescend to follow me,

I fear, ‘Mr. John,’” said the hateful voice in his ear, as he stood at fault in a passage, on each side of which were numerous doors, either of which might have led to the apartment of which he was in search. “That room,” he added, “belongs to Mademoiselle Julie, her ladyship’s own maid; and this one to the nursery, by courtesy; but the boy is seldom in it, for if he is not with her ladyship, he is with Sir Marmaduke—he is the Benjamin of the family you know.”

These words were uttered with a malignant sneer, which was thrown away upon Mr. Baynard, whose mind was too much engrossed with the thought of this self-sought crisis in his own fate, to allow him to dwell upon the impertinence of a man whom he treated as beneath his contempt.

“Have the goodness to lead the way,” was all the reply he made to the observation which was intended as a taunt.

His business was with Sir Marmaduke, and with him only; a fact of which he resolved shortly to make Mr. Grimstone aware, should he attempt to intrude himself as a witness of the coming interview. He followed him now up a flight of stairs to a story of the house evidently appropriated to the Baronet's sole use, and through a whole suite of apartments, (of which the pictures and furniture bore witness to the dilettante life of their occupier,) to the one which contained all that remained of the disciple of Voltaire; of the dissolute representative of a disgraced house; of the once gay and affable profligate, Sir Marmaduke Baynard.

There is generally a moral to be pointed from the end of such men—the Rochesters, and the Buckinghams, who have obtained eminence in the school of vice. In Sir Marmaduke's case, it did not speak from the squalid surroundings of which we are

told in the ghastly picture presented by the hand of a master, with which we are all familiar, and through which we have all seen

“The star and garter dangling from the bed,
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,”

the sole relics of the greatness built upon a foundation of sand.

The desolation which surrounded Sir Marmaduke, was presented in the total wreck of what had once been a goodly dwelling-place; in the annihilation of the frame-work which seemed to contain, rather than to hold, the flickering life of which the only witness was the light which gleamed from out of the hollow sockets of the eyes, and which, according to the dying man's terrible creed, was the death-glare of an expiring soul. A body, or rather a skeleton that was already as good as dead—truly there appeared to be but a shadow

between "young John" and his inheritance then.

His first feeling was one of horror; and his second, of deep unmitigated pity, as he paused in contemplation of this *thing* with burning eyes, that had once been a man like himself; and the words of conventional greeting which had been ready on his tongue, faltered into an unmeaning utterance in the soul-appalling presence of one, who, shadowy and unreal as he seemed, held his future destiny in his skeleton grasp.

"Father," he said at last, and the sound was as strange on his lips, as that of some word belonging to an unknown tongue—"I did not know that you had been ill."

The reply which he had scarcely expected came readily at the bidding of the sick man; the voice and the eyes still lived and seemed to galvanize rather than *animate* the lips, which moved mechanically

as though in habitual obedience to the unparalyzed power of the will.

“Of course not—I spared you as long as I could. I respected your filial feelings sufficiently, and would have spared you to the end; so get the proprieties over, dissemble your natural grief, make the conventional dutiful speech, and get to the business at once. I was in hopes you would have spared me any transaction of that sort, and have waited patiently for this,” he added, touching with bony finger a parchment document, which lay at his hand on the bed.

“I must wait until we are alone, Sir,” said the young man significantly; but scorning to indicate even by the quiver of an eye-lash, the direction in which Mr. Grimstone stood, who had taken up a position in a convenient place, both for seeing and hearing, concealed by the drapery of a heavy silk curtain which hung

at the foot of the bed. "My business is for your private ear."

There was no tenderness, or even pity in his accents now, and the unknown word was not likely again to force a passage over his lips. The bitter irony, the stinging cruelty of his father's address had sealed for ever the fountain which never failed to flow under the influence of any of the nobler emotions of the soul. It was an atmosphere in which he could hardly breathe; in which his moral nature folded itself away, like the leaves of the Mimosa exposed to a foreign touch. His friend and aged Mentor would have trembled, could he have seen the expression which darkened over his face, with the sound of those ominous words still ringing in his ears, "I am not responsible for the consequences, if I am what I have been called to-day." That very darkening which betokened the conflict raging within,

stirred the evil nature of the dying man, as the sight of blood infuriates an animal of prey.

“Melodramatic, by Jove!” he said, with kindling eyes. “You have missed your vocation, boy; you would have graced the boards of tragedy. You must teach Marmaduke to recite, ‘Upon the Grampian hills my father feeds his flock!’ You must teach him to be a country gentleman, when I am dead and gone, that he may prove a worthy successor to the Prince among the clod-pates and dairy-maids. ‘Sir Marmaduke the good’ would be something new, and exquisitely refreshing to the agricultural mind. You must know,” he added, bending those keen eyes full upon his elder son’s face, “that under certain conditions, I am going to make you the boy’s guardian, John.”

It was a generous impulse which moved the brother’s heart, as Sir Marmaduke

uttered these words. It was like a fresh breeze springing up suddenly, and sweeping the breath of flowers over a thirsty land, for it renewed hope that was fast dying out of "young John's" soul—the hope that the question which he had travelled so many miles to ask, would be answered in a manner that would effectually remove the shadow of the curse, which he believed to be hovering over him.

"You need not fear my betraying that trust," he replied; "I have seen the child, and we are already the best of friends."

"That is well," said the voice, while the mocking spirit laughed out of the lamp-like eyes, "I hope the conditions will suit you equally well."

The breeze died away again, as these words were uttered; and the lurid sky became overcast with the presage of evil to come.

"You can bring the boy here, Luke,"

Sir Marmaduke went on say; "he will not interfere with our privacy, for he can barely lisp; and he has a right to be present, as the one chiefly interested" (here he again indicated the document before alluded to) "in the matters under discussion to-day; for I conclude that this 'business' is of a testatory nature."

The last words were addressed to his elder son, whose lips quivered a little under the taunt conveyed; for although it was true, that he had expected nothing better, or nothing else, at Sir Marmaduke's hands, he had of late been exposed to the softer influences of domestic affection, and the recollection of the accents of a beloved voice that ever greeted him as "dear lad," made the cold tones of unconcealed dislike on the lips of a dying father harder to bear, and more fraught with a keen sense of pain, than he could once have brought himself to have believed.

“It is scarcely necessary to remind me of the aversion you entertain for me, Sir, and to this score I must attribute the imputation which I scorn otherwise to refute;” he remarked in his turn, for in one thing this father and son, whose natures were as opposite as the poles, resembled one another — they liked to stand face to face with a foe, and if there was a stab to be given, would come round to the front to inflict it. Sir Marmaduke, even to his confidential valet and foster-brother, had never abused the son whom he hated; but face to face with him, as we have seen, he would arm every word he addressed to him with a poisoned barb of scorn.

It was in his case, indeed, the only trace of the courage that had once been the unfailing attribute of every true-born Baynard. Physically, he had been, even in his youthful days, notoriously a coward; “a cur,” as we have heard him called

by those who remembered his career in Derefordshire, disgracefully terminated as it had been by his own flight. He had rather boasted of his delicate physical development amongst his own set, as being in opposition to what he was pleased to call the brute force, which had hitherto been a characteristic of the Baynard stock. But he had the mental courage, lacking in many a better man, of doing battle with words, face to face with the object of his hate. He had once, indeed, been a master in the art, and had possessed the truly satanic gift of dragging down and degrading the higher nature, for the time being at least, to the level of his own, and of making virtue ridiculous in the eyes of its possessors. Curious as it will sound to many, there was that in Sir Marmaduke's nature which had made many honest men afraid of him in his day, and no one had ever been exposed to the battery of his

well-aimed mockeries without a feeling coming over him that the whole superstructure of his moral nature was an imposition, and a sham, in which he had at the best but barely learnt to believe.

“It is too late in the day to bandy sentiment. I like the business flavour the better of the two,” he observed, in answer to his son’s words. “Here comes the boy,” he added, as a young Italian woman entered, carrying in her arms the child, who had absolutely refused to intrust himself to the keeping of Mr. Grimstone, even for the short transit from his mother’s, to Sir Marmaduke’s room; but who now stretched his arms gladly towards the ghastly figure in the bed, for he knew that there, at least, he was beloved, and with a child, as with a woman, this conviction is one that inspires confidence, in what appears to all the rest of the world, to be a broken reed,

ready to pierce the hand which trusts to it for guidance or support.

“*This* is not sentiment, this is *truth*,” observed the old man, as he placed his hand caressingly on the beautiful innocent head of the Benjamin of his old age, in whose behalf, indeed, he displayed the symptoms of dotage, which would have excited his keenest derision, had he witnessed them on the part of another.

“Give him his toys, girl,” he said, addressing the young nurse, whose large black eyes were fixed wonderingly on the face of the stranger, standing with a dark cloud on his brow, mutely, on the other side of the bed. “When you have done looking at the gentleman, at least,” he added, for he could not refrain from mocking, even at her; and he smiled to himself his peculiar ghastly smile—in which the eyes took no part—as he saw how the colour came painfully into her

olive face, as she laid one costly article after another, before the boy, who gazed seriously on his "grown up" toys.

"We will have the child between us," the Baronet observed to his heir, "but to all intents and purposes we shall be alone, so let us to business, with what appetite we may."

Mr. Grimstone and the nurse had by this time retired, and "young John" stood literally in the presence of his fate. He was tongue-tied for a moment or two ; how could he mention the pure love of his soul, or breathe the name of Mary Trevvian in that presence, in the atmosphere of a nature from which his own recoiled ? A happy thought struck him, he would begin with the result of the election, and so, be led on to speak of the more important fact, of his intended marriage with the great-niece of the Rector of King's Baynard.

“ I must tell you, Sir, in the first place, that I have been returned for West Deresfordshire, by a majority of a hundred and ten. I have followed your advice, and studied popularity during my two years’ residence at King’s Baynard. I think you must own that the results prove the fact.”

“ Very much so ; and I wish you joy of *this* crowning reward of good-boyism. Did you come over the Channel to become the bearer of the tidings to your proud father, boy ? Or have you ‘ a breath to blow away this praise,’ for his private ear, bearing upon the number of golden ducats that have rolled out of your pockets into those of the free and independant electors, who have returned you so triumphantly for West Deresfordshire ? Out with it. You can lay aside the mask here. My cheque-book is ready to hand.”

“ I came, on the contrary, to ask rather than to impart information. I am come, Sir, to speak to you of—my mother.”

The words came painfully from his lips, and his eyes fixed themselves steadily on his father's face, as though to dare him to profane that sacred memory either with a look, or with a word of scorn. “ *My mother.*” He did not say “ your wife.” Was it that his whole soul repelled the thought, that the pure womanly spirit—which every true man believes his mother to have possessed, was ever linked in the closest bonds of communion with his, upon whom he almost shuddered to look? It might have been so. I only know that he said with a slight stress upon the appropriating word, “ I am come to speak to you of *my mother.*”

There was silence in the room for a minute or so, unbroken save by the chink-

ing of the costly trinkets 'one against the other, with which the boy was playing at his father's side upon the bed. Then the voice, which was as the voice of fate to "young John," was again lifted up to say :

"Take my advice and wait for *this*. Do not run your head against a wall. In this document you will find all that it concerns you to know."

"It concerns me to know *all*," was the sudden and fierce reply. "I appeal to you, Sir Marmaduke, as a gentleman—as a *man*, whether I could make a pure innocent girl my wife, without being able to tell her who, and what my mother was?"

The child was startled at the tones of the voice, in which spoke the concentrated passion of a nature which was as strong as death, and he was what mothers and nurses call "making a lip" to cry, when

his father put his hand soothingly upon his head, remarking bitterly to his eldest son as he did so, "Your melodrame frightens the boy, and I do not see the drift of your speech. There will be a *very cogent reason* against your making any 'pure innocent girl' your wife, as long as I live to forbid the banns; and that document contains matter which will ensure my wishes being fulfilled, when I am dead and gone. You will hold King's Baynard for the term of your natural life upon one condition only, that *you remain unmarried*, and that the property passes intact, to my son Marmaduke Baynard, who is the *sole and rightful heir*."

We talk carelessly sometimes of the "anguish of the soul," but it is a fearful thing to look upon, when it shakes the bodily frame of a strong man, and when it makes it quiver and reel, *drunk* with the

agony which has pierced it, through the medium of the receiving brain. The substance of the ghastly shadow which had haunted the mind of "young John" (I must not call him Baynard now) had suddenly advanced, and trampled out his life, with the crush of its cloven heel. His whole nature tottered and reeled, under the blow aimed at his honour, and therefore at his life. A touch of compassion moved even the stony heart of Sir Marmaduke, as he looked on the desolation he had created, and the child dropping the toys from his hand, suddenly reared up his little form upon the bed, and stretching his arms towards his brother, fairly lifted up his voice and wept. That brother for the first time repulsed him with one hand, as with the other he wiped away the cold drops which stood like beads upon his broad, honest brows, while the words "It is a base and cruel lie," bearded the relent-

less nature again to the battle, which it had no wish and no intention to forego.

“ I have not deserved this at your hand. I have done my best to atone for the sins of my youth. If this child had not been born to me, the secret might have gone down with me to the grave; but as it is, he shall not be robbed of his inheritance, or sell his birth-right for a mess of pottage. Look here, boy, this document which I hold, contains the secret which you are trying to force from me: in it, you are provided for handsomely—nobly—upon one sole condition, that you remain *unmarried for ever*, and that no son born to you in wedlock shall ever come between King's Baynard and its rightful heir. Do you accept my conditions, or do you not?”

“ I reject them, I trample upon them with contempt and utter scorn. I will only accept one thing at your hands; the power to refute the slander that has tar-

nished my mother's name—and King's Baynard, and the bitter curse which is upon it, I will renounce as I would throw away a straw. You can rob me of my inheritance if you will give me back my honour, and the purity of my mother's name. *These are my conditions.* Will you accept them? It will be better for you, and for the child."

He was fighting hard for his life; he was offering to barter what had once been dear as his heart's blood, to hold the citadel of his honour secure. He was condescending even to stratagem, to effect his purpose, when he added the words "it will be better for you and for the child."

The wily Sir Marmaduke saw his advantage; his foe was at bay, and had been driven into the offering of a bribe, into the interposing of a shield between the threatening weapon and the vital part.

He smiled a grim, bitter smile, as he replied—"If you were what you maintain that you are, the inheritance would not be in your power to bestow upon Marmaduke, or upon another. It is strictly entailed; you might marry and have a son. *My* conditions, on the contrary, secure my son's future inheritance, and they must be these or none. Give me here your solemn word that you will remain single to the end of your days, and the secret that disgraces you, shall die with me. I cannot in justice to Marmaduke say more. You had better not ask for more, unless you wish to hear that which would crush the pride out of you for ever, and leave you without a landmark, or a straw to catch at—which would humble you to the very dust at my feet, and the sting of it will be, that you will find in the end the deep debt of gratitude which you owe to *me*. You that have not a drop of Baynard blood in your

veins—you, that have played the part down at King's Baynard of a charlatan—an impostor—a sham. I defy you to do your worst. I have always hated you, and crippled and helpless as I lie here, I can trample you under my feet with a word."

The aspect of the old man, who had lashed himself into rage by the fury of his own words, which seemed to rattle like hailstones upon the tortured brain of his hearer, was terrible to look upon; if ever an evil spirit looked out exultingly from the window of the human eye, it looked out then from the hollow sockets in which burnt the flame, so soon to be extinguished in the night wind of annihilation and death. It was a terrible encounter; the duel of two souls, both in deadly earnest, battling for victory on the very brink of the grave, standing in the reputed relation-

ship of father and son, the only spectator an innocent babe. It was the younger man's turn to speak, and I own, without a blush for his honour, as I say it, that it was in a fierce and uncontrollable spirit, that he made answer to the man who lay and looked at him, as a venomous reptile might gaze on the noble quarry struggling in the pitfall, or in the net.

“I fling back your challenge in your teeth. I would give much to be able to repudiate the taint of the accursed stain. I would give much to know that the blood of an honest man flowed in my veins—of a man, to whom a woman's name was a sacred thing—of a man who would scorn to sully the fame of the woman who had borne his name, with the foul slander which will recoil on the tongue that uttered it. I would give much to know that what you say is

true ; for the Baynard blood must be purified in a furnace of fire, before it is worthy of the veins of a man. I would pray God on my knees, every morning and every night, to prove the words that you have uttered this day ; but I feel too surely by the curse that is upon me, that I am a true branch of that corrupted tree."

"And so, you have heard the 'auld wife's' tale of the curse, second hand from the parson, who is in his dotage, I hear ? I should have imagined that the "raw head and bloody bones" would scarcely have scared the hectoring 'heir of King's Baynard.' They tell me you have carried things with a high hand down there, boy ; that the daw has worn the plumes of the peacock with an air and a strut, which has passed with the 'country folk as the genuine article. Pity to relinquish them

for the sake of some doll's face, that hopes to smirk proudly under the weight of the Baynard diamonds. Other little country hearts have beaten quickly with that idea before now, and been content with paste after all. Did you ever by chance hear the story of Mabel Trevylian? She thought once to be a baronet's wife, and flaunt it proudly at foreign courts; but failing the master, she was glad to put up with the *man*."

"So, there is another tale of outrage and wrong, to be laid at our door; another broken heart to be put down to our account. It is as I thought, then, and the infamy of our house is sealed. Have you still to tell me that you were cognizant of the fate of that unhappy girl, and that you stretched out no hand to her rescue? I would even call you *father* again, if you could tell me that this were not so."

“You do me too much honour—an honour, I fear, that I have no right to claim. I have spared you, and I will spare you, boy, if you do not goad me too far. Accept the conditions that I again offer you, and my lips are sealed. There is ignominy in store for you, if you reject them, from which, loving you little, as I do, I would spare you, for your mother’s sake. You are slow at reading riddles, for I have twice more than hinted at the truth.”

“I did not come here either to propound, or to guess at riddles. I came to ask you a simple question, to which I require, and will have a simple answer. I came to ask you, Sir Marmaduke Baynard, lying on your death-bed, as you will answer at the great day of judgment, in the presence of that God before whom you will shortly stand, was my mother a *wife*, or not?”

The words which seemed to sear his lips as he pronounced them, missed their aim, and he knew it directly they were uttered. Sir Marmaduke was too skilful a fencer, not to parry a thrust of which the intention was better than the skill; and "young John" felt as a man feels when engaged in mortal combat with a skilful adversary, more cool in blood and less vitally interested than himself, who strikes his foil in the air, at the moment when he believes the fatal home-thrust to be made.

"You really act out the old scene uncommonly well, boy. Pity that the country bumpkins are not here to do the Greek chorus business, to their hectoring chief. For your mother's sake I decline to answer your question. I have more respect for her memory, than for her son. Your mouthing and incantations, are alike lost upon me."

It would have been a touching spectacle to one acquainted with the lordly nature of the man thus held at bay, to see him stand thus mentally writhing under the sentence that fell from the poisoned source of the old man's tongue; to see him bound hand and foot by the strong web of destiny, with his heart literally breaking under the load of his shame. He felt morally, as a drowning man feels physically, when the senses are melting themselves into impalpable essence, and the deeds done in the flesh, come small and great, trifling and important, evil and good, in the space of a lightning flash before him, and he embraces the whole past in that instant of expiring time. His love, his life, his filial regard for the old man, with white hair and venerable presence, who for his part loved him as his own son; the green uplands of his fair inheritance; the angel face of the boy Gilly, with its expression of

earnest yearning love for himself; the very images of his favourite horses and dogs; and above all the atmosphere of the honour which he had earned for himself at King's Baynard, presented themselves as tokens of a dying past; and the kiss which Mary Trevylian had exchanged with him, when he parted from her, was like the whisper of the seraph's wing, which was bearing his soul away from the earth. The agony had stunned his senses into momentary death, and the bitterness of it was past for the moment. It was but for a short time—he awoke to the pain again; but a change had come over him; he had given up hope, and he said simply, as a child might say to one who possessed power over his destiny:

“I have been over hasty, perhaps; I only ask you, Sir Marmaduke, to tell me how little I have left to live for. *For the sake of this child that whom you love*, tell me

my mother's history, and I will go.

There was a shade of remorse in the cruel eyes as these words were slowly pronounced. Sir Marmaduke had never loved the lips that uttered them, but a feeling of pity took possession of him for a single moment, which, however, died within his breast when he looked at the Benjamin by his side.

“ I will speak to you in parables, if you like, and leave it to your own sagacity to fill in the facts and the names. You are like your mother in one thing, you are wayward, and wilful to your own heart. Remember that you have brought it on yourself.”

The young man merely bowed his head in reply, and prepared himself to listen to the parable, which would admit of but one solution. The substance of it sealed his fate.

It was related in these words.

“In an out of the way dismal corner of the land of fog and suicide, there once reigned and ruled a king, who was an alien (in heart) to the soil, and who, forced to reside upon his paternal acres, became a victim to unmitigated *ennui*.

“In the neighbourhood of the royal abode, there bloomed and flourished a lovely maiden, whose charms were the wonder of the unsophisticated people among whom she lived, and the King looked upon her beauty with admiring eyes. The maiden was wayward, and romantic, as was the fashion of the day. A stolen interview had more charms for her, than the open homage which was paid to her by the youth of the country, and the black eyes of the foster-brother of the King, made an impression upon her sweet susceptible heart, which (when she found it was not the intention of the King to make her an offer of his royal hand)

deepened into a passion, over which she exercised no proper maiden control. The King abdicated, and his retinue followed him to take up their abode on a foreign soil. All but the black-eyed foster-brother of the monarch, who, under the character and disguise of a painter, remained in the neighbourhood which contained the lovely maid, who lent a willing ear to his protestations of unbounded love. Their stolen courtship ended in flight; *they were married*, and joined the court of the abdicated King, whose eyes were suddenly opened to the marvellous beauty of the woman, who if the laws of his country had not forbidden it, he would now willingly have made his Queen. This being impossible, and the heart of the King being violently inflamed with the love that consumed him, he became a prey to melancholy, and his courtiers lamented over the lost gaiety of the court. The foster-brother was a faith-

ful subject; he held the doctrine that the 'King can do no wrong,' and his beautiful wife became the *nominal* Queen, and held her revels gaily, in most of the great cities of Europe, received and honoured by the great potentates of society, who believed her to be the wife of the monarch. This openly practised deception complicated matters with regard to a son that had been born to the obliging husband, in the first year of their married life, and who was now either to be altogether ignored, or must be openly acknowledged as the heir apparent, to the royal honours of his reputed father. That child was the object of passionate love to his erring mother, and the object of passionate hate to the man to whom she had borne no living child; but harassed by the continual prayers and entreaties of the woman he loved, he owned him and adopted him as his own.

“ Whether in so doing he nourished a viper in his bosom, it remained for time to prove. The woman died and was buried, commending her son with her last breath to the care of the King, who did not fail in the trust committed to him, and to whom he behaved in all but affection, which he never possessed, exactly as though he had been bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Late in the evening of his age, however, there was born to the King a son, whose inheritance had been bestowed upon one of alien blood, and there arose a question in the mind of the King, whether the spurious heir should be ousted from the inheritance which he had unknowingly usurped—whether the son of the bondwoman, in fact, to quote scripture like the parson himself, should be “heir with his son,” even with the Isaac of his old age. Conscience and reason said, no ; but the voice of the dead pleaded in favour

of the alien, and a compromise was made between the two.

“I ask you, *Mr. John Grimstone*, will you accept my conditions now?”

The last words were uttered with a vehemence that told with sudden contrast, after the forced calm in which the easily divined parable had been told, and they were the last that Sir Marmaduke Baynard ever uttered on earth—for as though in bitter vengeance for the diabolical cruelty of that tongue, it was smitten with paralysis as the last word died upon the rigid lips. Though he lived for months after that terrible interview, the wicked Baronet never spoke again.

CHAPTER IV.

“ ‘ He comes to-night,’ she said and smiled,
And twined amidst her hair,
The sweet blue-eyed forget-me-not,
To make her seem more fair.”

BALLAD.

AND Mary Trevelyian waited hopefully for her lover's return. The three days passed that were to bring him to her side; she came back home, as she called the Rectory now, to make glad preparations for his reception, who was to be a gallant bridegroom so soon. Aunt Dorothy remained at Vavasour, with the young widow, on whom, in the very abyss and darkness of her sorrow, a gleam

of light had dawned, for she was the mother of a living son. Tears had come to her—life had come to her—hope had come to her, with the first wail of that feeble voice.

“God has sent him,” she muttered when they first put her baby into her arms; and then turning to the attendants, who stood awe-struck at her side, she said, while her dark eyes gleamed with a heavenly light,

“You must not let me die, now; it is his father’s trust to me. Oh God! that it should be only a trust.”

It was a good sign, as Aunt Dorothy well knew, that she could be emotional again; it is the sign of sorrow’s death-stroke, when we cease to conjure up our own tears, when we cease, as it were, to pity ourselves; and what, after all, is human sorrow but this feeling? For why do we mourn the dead, but because

our own heart-strings, not theirs, are bleeding with the agony of the wrench? They are in the haven where they would be, but we must stretch once more a shattered sail to the wind, and ride the waters of a desolate sea.

Mary, as I said before, was come home, and the love-light was dancing in her hazel gray eyes as she stood at her fresh toilette table, draped in snowy white, and arranged the abundant tresses of her hair, in the very glass before which Mabel Trevelylian had so often practised beauty airs, and tossed her coquettish head. Her wayward life had been broken off so soon, that her youth and beauty had, as it were, been sealed in the memory of those who still bestowed a thought upon the hapless woman, who had left King's Baynard a young and blooming girl, so many long years before.

Mary Trevelylian, in thinking of her,

thought of her ; as a contemporary of her own, who, had she lived, would have been as a mother to her, as far as years were concerned. Mabel Trevylian was the wayward girl still, in the imagination of those who thought of her in the home which she had desolated by her shame. Better that it should have been so always, better for all, had that terrible parable been untold, which drew the veil from the face of the past ; a past sealed in infamy, and blotted by the finger of disgrace. Hard words, cruel words, to come near and touch with their tainted breath, the lives of the pure and the noble, and to trail their honour and their happiness in the dust.

There was no shade on Mary's brow that night. Fate was so tender of the young, fair creature, that it forbore to cast the shadow of its brooding wing over her path, and she almost reproached

herself for the gladness that was throbbing at her heart, when she thought of the pale mother, whose very joy was embittered by the sting of bereavement, whose great sorrow had come upon her, according to her own favourite expression, “un-awares.”

“How can I be so selfish?” she said to herself, stopping suddenly in the song she had been unconsciously trolling as she disposed the band of blue ribbon to the greatest advantage amongst the rich auburn of her hair; and which happened to be the old-fashioned nursery rhyme which had taken hold of her, as the words of a foolish song sometimes do take hold of us, when they have been associated with any particular era of our lives. She had sung them once laughingly to her lover when he had brought her home the ribbon, the badge of the party who had chosen him to repre-

sent their cause, and she was singing them then in fond remembrance of that happy day,

“ Oh, dear ! what can the matter be,
Johnnie's so long at the fair,
He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbon
To tie up my bonnie brown hair.”

“ He will be back to-night,” she muttered, as a rosy blush spread itself over her face like a cloud, “ and I must be happy, whether it is selfish or not.”

If she had needed any proof of how deeply she loved him ; it would have been afforded her on that occasion, when after an absence of a few days only, her heart went out to meet him with a joy that can only come to us in the spring-time of life. A joy which we accept with childish confidence in Him who sends it, as the birthright and attribute of our youth.

“He will be back to-night;” she had said, as she turned from the glass before which she had been decking herself for him; and tripped lightly down stairs to make tea for the “dear old man,” who had pined for her return, and who seemed now to exist only in her presence, and on the thoughts of his “dear lad.”

It was a lovely evening in spring. The sun was dipping in glory behind the range of hills, which bounded the western landscape; the rich scent of flowers came in at the open window, and the musical notes of the thrush singing his evening song of praise, made the harmony perfect to those whose senses were attuned to the enjoyment of it; and as Mary leaned out of the window for a minute to conceal the tears of joy which filled her eyes then roaming over the undulating sweep of the Baynard uplands, she said softly to herself. “Your master will be home to night.” She was

beginning to share his pride in his inheritance, and indeed King's Baynard never looked lovelier than it did in its spring mantle of under green, gemmed with the jewel blossoms which graced it as with a royal diadem. The Baynard woods were carpeted with primroses, and peopled with nightingales, and the young fronds of the springing ferns, embroidered the rich pattern of nature's own devising.

"How beautiful it is!" she exclaimed aloud, as she turned from the window, and seated herself at the tea table. "It is by far the most beautiful place I ever saw, Uncle Gilbert; I never thought half enough of it till now. I really begin to think I am a lucky girl?" she added playfully, and kissing the old man on the forehead as she presented him with a fragrant cup of his favourite beverage. "I would not tell John so, of course; but it has been *your* opinion all along I know."

“You deserve it, my love, you are a good child; but you must not be coy any longer Mabel; you must give him his reward at once. I must hear your wedding bells before I die.”

“Hush! Hush!” said his great-niece putting his hand over his mouth. “Nobody talks of wedding bells, and dying, in the same breath. I am not in a humour to say him nay just now; so the matter will rest with him. I saw Saunders go by with the horses just now, Uncle,” she added after a pause. “He was leading the colt, so John is going to try to get rid of me, by breaking his neck. It will be dark by the time they come back, for the coach is not due at Elminster, till eight.”

“He will stop as he goes by, and send Saunders back with the horses,” answered the old man who was evidently nervous, and in whose eyes sat the eagerness of an expectancy, not sufficiently unalloyed to be

called hope. He was beginning to tremble now that fate was coming face to face, and with the impressiveness of a susceptible nature, Mary caught a little of the feeling of which she was far from divining the cause. She was restless, and could not settle to any occupation; she went out into the garden, and back again into the house, and strained her eyes up the road before there was a shadow of possibility that her lover could come back to King's Baynard, and to her.

“Don't be anxious, my dear,” said her Uncle fondly, as his eyes followed her restless movement from place to place, and his hand lay trembling on the gold head of his cane, as though he were about to rise, and only kept himself from doing so by a strong effort of will. “Don't be anxious, there is no vice about the colt; he is only raw, as all young ones are. He will be here all in good time.”

He thought to deceive her; he was striving to deceive himself, by casting the burden of his anxiety on the back of the "young one" that the master had left express orders was to be sent to meet him, on the day which he had fixed for his return to King's Baynard.

"I am not afraid of the colt," answered Mary smiling, "nor am I particularly anxious, dear Uncle; but I do not like to expect too long, and it is time he were here now, if he is coming to-night."

"Hardly, my dear, hardly; tell me what it is o'clock *exactly*," he added, showing plainly that his anxieties outran her own. "A quarter to ten? then he could hardly be here yet."

"I hear horses now," exclaimed Mary, as the blood rushed hotly into her face, and she leaned her head far out of the window into the darkness, to conceal her confusion from the eyes of the servant

who was at that moment entering the room to assist his master to bed. It was indeed the long-measured step of "the colt," that broke the stillness of the night; but it passed slowly on, unbroken even for a moment in its regular cadence, as it passed the Rectory gate.

"He is not come then after all." The light of glad expectancy died out of Mary's face, as she uttered these words, and the last echo of the horse hoofs died away in the distance. A little sob rose involuntarily into her throat, and tears that had a different source from the former ones, dimmed her eyes. She had been so shaken with the events of the week before, and she had so firmly believed in his coming that night, that she fairly broke down under what, at another time, would have been a disappointment and nothing more.

"Saunders might have stopped to tell

us," said the old man with a feeble petulance of tone, which was even more touching than the young girl's tears; for the wail of age is as helpless and impotent as that of the tenderest infancy.

"I cannot make it out," answered Mary, "the horses were not together; perhaps Saunders found that the colt would not lead, and got some one to ride him out. Do not vex yourself, dear Uncle, he will come to-morrow."

And the sweet, unselfish child-nature now devoted itself to soothing the disappointment, which it might easily have appropriated as its own.

Mary, indeed, knew nothing of the deep vague dread which had taken possession of the old man's mind; the dread that his worst presentiments were realized, and that the meaning of the words which had been so continually running in his ears, might at that very moment, perhaps,

have met with their most deadly interpretation. "I am not responsible for the consequences, if I am what I have been called to-day."

"Why did I let him go? Why did I let him go?" he kept repeating to himself, long after his head was laid on the pillow, which proved a pillow of thorns to him that night; and Mary might have echoed the cry, had she known the horror which dictated it, "Why did you let him go? Why did you let him go?"

We all know what it is to see the light of morning dawn upon the haunting visions of the night, and to find them dispelled like an evil dream. Darkness is a mysterious agency, and its effect over the human mind can only be attributed to some occult cause. As children, we are cowards in the dark; as grown men and women, we are cowards in the night. There are hobgoblins and bogies that

haunt us in the cold practical unbelief of middle age, in the dead hours of silence and darkness, which can bring the cold drops to our brows, as surely as did the impalpable presence of the horned monster, with burning eyes, in the days of our benighted childhood.

There are some sorrows, again, in themselves so deep, as to become impervious and inaccessible to the effects of any outward agency. "Young John" had spent that night at King's Baynard alone in the ghostly house, and saw or heard neither sight nor sound, although *something* had passed at his very hand, which had uttered the familiar cry "Ah! Sir Mark! Sir Mark," which had breathed upon him with its freezing breath, and touched him with its skeleton hand. An ominous welcome to the home which was no longer his.

The mental vision of the uneducated, even when sharpened by affection, is not

particularly keen. Saunders had observed as he expressed it, "something queer" about his young master when he met him at Elminster that night; "but he had laughed out quite cheerful like," he added, "when he said, 'well, Saunders, I am come home,' " and the honest heart of the man rejoiced to think "how he had laughed out;" so that he recurred to the circumstance once or twice over the potation in which, as a favourite of the housekeeper's, he was indulged as a "night cap" after his long ride. To tell the truth, the impression which that strident laugh had conveyed to the man's mind was one, which former experience of his master's habits gave him no right to entertain; he believed "that he had been drinking somebody's health a little too freely," and in this opinion he was confirmed, as he followed him almost at a foot's pace from Elminster, and when he saw him pass the

hactory gate without attempting to stop, or to turn in.

“It’s better than if he had ridden ‘ventersome,’ but it wasn’t like our master for all that.”

The old housekeeper, Mrs. Grimstone, made no answer to the man’s remark. She was getting very old, and the other servants had noticed that she was breaking fast; the strict discipline which she had once maintained had lately been somewhat relaxed, and report went so far as to say that the old lady had frequent recourse to the same solace with which she had treated the head-groom, Mr. Saunders, and that a somewhat potent “night cap” was become with her an habitual thing. It was the custom of her fellow servants to remark that the old lady “knew a sight of things” about the family, which had never passed her lips, and that she and her husband, the old butler, (lately dead)

could have disclosed some startling secrets, "an they would."

In this suspicion we shall be inclined to agree with them, for they had lived abroad with Sir Marmaduke until the death of the unhappy woman, whose wayward folly had woven such a web of misery round the hearts of those with whom she had entwined her destiny. Her mother's heart had been broken, as we have heard, long ago: her father's grey hairs had been steeped in bitterness, and her son was smitten down like a young oak, blasted in the very pride of its strength through the folly and the sin of her youth. Smitten, blasted, seared to the very heart's core, wounded in a vital part, yet still alive, the young man never knew how he passed that miserable night. Twice he had taken up a loaded pistol, and twice he had laid it down again, restrained by the strong love for Mary Trevelyian, which was the

only emotion which still lived in his soul. She, who was lying awake and praying for him but a few hundred yards away from the place, where darkness and desolation reigned paramount, saved a life in that night of watching and anguish, as surely as though she had taken the deadly weapon from his rash erring hand.

“No,” he said, as the sweet loving face presented itself to his imagination with a pleading reproachful gaze, “I will wait, it will not be for long,” and sitting down, overpowered with bodily weariness, he laid his head upon his folded arms and slept. The coldness of the dawn awoke him with a shiver, that ran through his whole frame like a death-stroke. He rose mechanically, and passed into an inner room, which was his bed-chamber, and kindled the mouldering embers on the hearth into a blaze, heaping on dry fuel as though he were feeding a furnace in which

to burn out the memory of the bitter week, which formed a yawning chasm between him and all that had been dear to him in life. The dawning of a new day dispelled no haunting visions for him. Sorrow had reached the crowning point, when neither darkness, or the powers of imagination, could conjure up any fresh terrors for him.

It was not so with Mary Trevylian; dawn came to her with hope and gladness on its wing. She laughed to herself at the foolish fancies which she had indulged in the night before, as she rose and opened her window to let in the song of the birds, and the breath of the flowers, and thanked the Giver of all, for His rich gifts to the sons of men.

"He will come to-day," she said confidently to her Uncle, as she paid him her morning visit in his own room; and she begged him not to think of sending to

the Hall to enquire if Mr. Baynard had returned. “*Of course* he has not returned, Uncle Gilbert, or he would have come here first to report himself. Saunders evidently came back without his master last night, and he can know no more than we do of the cause of the delay. We must not let them imagine up there, that we should have to send to fetch him, dear,” she added playfully, and humouring the old man, as she would have humoured a child.

He was looking flushed and anxious. He had a foreboding, unacknowledged even to himself, that “young John” *had* returned the night before; but he could not communicate his doubts to Mary, without filling her innocent heart with the vague dread that was consuming his own.

“I will send up directly the child goes out for her walk,” he determined secretly;

and the opportunity soon arrived, for Mary, tempted by the brightness and beauty of the spring morning, put on hat and shawl, and wandered out to seek the ferny glades of the park, which had become her favourite haunt. She met with the Doctor at the lodge-gate, and exchanged a friendly greeting with him, remarking, as she did so,

“There is no one ill here, I hope, Dr. Blake?”

“Not to say ill, exactly; but the housekeeper at the Hall told me yesterday that she was anxious about the boy Gilly, who is her grandson, you know, and I thought I'd step round this morning, and see him.”

“I did not know that he was Mrs. Grimstone's grandson,” replied Miss Trevelyan, “I always thought he was the lodge-keeper's son.

“Oh, dear no! The old lady brought

the child back with her from foreign parts, and put him out to nurse at the lodge. No one asked any questions, and the lodge people made a good thing of it, for she pays them handsomely. Poor lad! he is sadly afflicted. It would be a mercy if he were to die."

"Oh, I hope not, Doctor. I should miss Gilly sadly; he is so fond of— Mr. Baynard," she said, with a blush. The first words had come inadvertently, and she was bound to finish what she had begun.

"They were expecting him back yesterday at the Hall, but I have not heard talk of his being come," said the Doctor, anxious to procure information, and unwilling to put a direct question, after the manner of gossipmongers in general.

"I do not think he is. I hope you will find Gilly better. Good morning,

Doctor," said Miss Trevylian, who felt that she was blushing under the shrewd gaze of the old Doctor, who had heard more than a rumour of the heir's return, and who wished to find out whether the young lady was aware of the fact.

"She is a pretty one," he said to himself, as she walked on with a light springing step, towards the park, "but as artful as the rest of them; don't tell me she doesn't know as well as I do, that Mr. John came home last night; Gad! but they're all alike. Well, how's the boy, missus?" he asked of the woman who came to the door to meet him, with the ready welcome which does not always attend the advent of the doctor, who gives his services gratis to the poor; and which spoke well for the somewhat rough-kerneled Doctor, of whom they all said, that "his bark was worse than his bite."

"He's pretty pure 'smorning, Doctor;

and thank you kindly," answered the woman. "He's been more satisfied, and like hisself, since he heard the young master come home last night. Why, bless you, Sir, he knowed the nag's step afore ever he came round the Rectory turn. He's mortal fond of Mr. John."

"So are other folks, who are not so honest about it," muttered the Doctor to himself. He could not forgive Miss Trevylian for trying to cheat him out of the news, with her unhesitating "*I do not think he is.*"

CHAPTER V.

“Are his wits safe? is he not light of brain?”

OTHELLO.

UNMINDFUL of the shrewd questioning gaze which the old doctor had bent upon her, as she made the unblushing assertion with regard to her disbelief in the rumour of “young John’s” return to King’s Baynard, Mary Trevylian went on her way, which was certainly not the way she would have chosen had she believed in the truth of the report. She was too proud in the very lealty and purity of her love, to have made such a concession to her maidenly rights, as to have gone to his own door to meet him, had she believed

it possible that he could have been at home so many hours without having been down to the Rectory, where such a warm welcome awaited him, and where two heart-aches at least might have been spared by his timely appearance. She wandered on in a pensive mood towards the sequestered glen in the park, where stood the giant oak, under which she and "young John" had wiled away many a happy hour in the early spring days, before the bustle and excitement of the election, had broken upon the peaceful quiet of their lives.

It was recorded in the annals of King's Baynard, that round this noble tree had once rallied a handful of brave hearts and true, who in the direst need of their unhappy king had risen, as desperate men will rise, to sacrifice themselves to the memory of a cause already dead. The flower and blossom of chivalry, fated to bloom on a grave. The "Standard Oak,"

as it was still called, lay almost entombed in the deep fern tangled thickets of the "Old Chase," the wildest and most secluded haunt of the deer, and it was a place shunned and avoided by the country folk, on account of its evil reputation as a haunted spot.

The graceful dappled creatures glided noiselessly away, scared by a foot-fall as gentle almost as their own, as Mary approached the "trysting tree," and paused under the spreading branches which still offered some shade, although more than half of them were bare, sapless, and dead. She was so painfully nervous (foolish she would have said herself, for she was not to be startled or easily scared) that the silence and solitude of the place awed and depressed her. She would have left it at once, but for very shame at the cowardice, which, as a true Trevylian, she would have scorned to allow to obtain the

mastery over the stronger part of her nature. After a moment's wavering her "noble soul ignoble fear subdued," and she seated herself on one of the gnarled roots of the old tree, which twisted themselves into fantastic forms, each one of which had a rugged character of its own, and as she sat, pondered upon many things; but principally she dwelt upon the fact of her great happiness, which had come to her, as she had once expressed it, in a flood; the happiness which she clasped spasmodically to her heart just then, as a child grasps the wings of a newly caught bird, unmindful of the pain to the captive, only fearful of letting it go.

From the contemplation of the effect she turned naturally enough to the cause, to the thought of the strong tender love that had dawned upon and glorified her life. She thought of all the noble and chivalric qualities of the man, whose very

pride in her was all the sweeter from the admixture of a dash of imperiousness in his own nature, which (as she thought) became him so well. It was like the nature of his favourite Talbot, a hound of the purest breed, who was gentle as a lamb under the caress of her soft fearless hand, but who would have resented any approach to familiarity from any less privileged quarter. "He is so noble," she said softly to herself, with reference to the master, rather than to the hound; but as the words passed her lips, she heard a rustle in the thicket behind her, and before she had time to spring to her feet, which it was her first impulse to do, the dog himself appeared and crouched before her, while his wise eyes, over which the lids drooped heavily, giving great solemnity to their expression, were fixed upon her face.

"Talbot, what are you doing here? no

mischievous, I hope," she said, looking suspiciously at the velvet dewlaps, which were in this instance guiltless of the blood of deer. Her heart smote her for her momentary doubt as to the integrity of his purpose; and weak and nervous as the unnatural tension of the last week had left her, the emotion which had been too long sealed, welled spring-like from the fountain head at the first approach to an exciting cause, and as she pressed her lips upon the wrinkled brow of the faithful hound, she burst into a passion of tears.

"You are a good dog," she said, at last, smiling through the tears that had relieved her; "you came to me when I was lonely. I shall always love you for this." Although after this out-burst there was silence again, as still as before, there was a tacit exchange between them of affection and confidence, and the young girl felt glad that she was no longer alone. Sud-

denly a voice that ought to have been a familiar one, but which refused to convey the accustomed image to her mind, pronounced her name close behind her "Mary!" and quickly as the report of a pistol answers to the touch on the trigger, the answer had flashed across her lips "John!"

It was the sudden meeting of soul with soul, over the chasm which had opened under their very feet with *something* between them, which had arisen since their last meeting, and of which Mary was only intuitively conscious—as impalpable as the "winds that are shut up," and yet an actual presence in her soul. With a startled cry, she stretched out both her hands, as though to break down the invisible barrier; but he made no corresponding action, nor did he attempt even an ordinary conventional greeting, but stood gazing at her, as he might have

gazed upon her face had she been dead—as upon something irrevocably *lost*.

“Speak to me, do not look like that, speak to me, if you do not wish to kill me. Do not turn away from me, *John!*”

She uttered the last word with the stress with which we emphasise the name of one whom we would arouse, upon whom danger is stealing in his sleep—“*John!*” and the beloved accents penetrated the thick cloud of the lethargy which was enshrouding his soul in its drowsy folds, so that he answered, as a man might answer half aroused from a profound slumber.

“What are you doing here, Mary? You should not have come here, my dear. You must never come here again.”

There was a sad weary glimmer in his eyes, which was a light nevertheless, and his voice had an unnatural sound, as though it were far away. His presence al-

together under such a changed aspect, would have frightened a less loyal and brave heart than the one which only beat for him; and which animated the soul of the young devoted girl, who now saw that some tornado had passed over his head, scorching it with its poisonous breath, and leaving him as she expressed it mentally, in that lightning flash of conviction, "very, very ill;" and in need of even such support as her own slender strength could afford. In the time for action, her presence of mind, and her lost nerve came back to her, and as she laid her hand gently but firmly on the strong right arm, which she had hoped to look to for support and protection through all her future life, she said quietly, "You must come home at once, John, you are not at all well; you must come back to the Rectory with me."

"You must indeed, or I shall be angry,"

she added with an affectation of an impatient gesture, which the rush of tears to her scarcely dried eyes made it pitiful to witness.

She had a more wayward spirit, however, to deal with than as yet she had any idea of, one who was not to be persuaded by loving words, or moved by impatient gestures even from her; and after fruitless endeavours to get him away from the spot so well calculated to increase the melancholy forebodings which now filled her imagination, she found herself in very weakness bound to yield to his entreaty, that she should seat herself once more at his side under the "trysting tree," which according to his dreamily uttered words, she was never from that time forth to seek again.

If her solitude had before oppressed her, the loneliness of the spot which fate had chosen for the terrible revelation which she had no choice but to listen to, before

she left it, was awful to her then ; as for three long hours with a man's courage, and with the forbearance and tenderness of the softest womanly nature, she fenced with the promptings of the spirit of evil which had taken possession of the fevered brain of the man she loved, until she had calmed him down to the docility of a child. She had risen grandly to the standard required of her, when with fierceness, foreign to his former character, he had even boasted of the temptation that had assailed him to put an end to his miserable life. " When I was not what you call ill, Mary," he added, touching his forehead, " when I was all right here ; but I could not do it until I had wished you good bye." His lip had trembled, and his glittering eyes had been moistened by a tear as he uttered the words, a sign which Mary seized upon eagerly as a good one, as she replied with the strong intensity of

purpose which can reach the most callous, or the most deadened perception.

“Listen to me, John; listen to me when I tell you that if I did not believe in my heart that you *were* very ill, when you raised even in thought an impious hand against your own life, I would never have taken your hand into my own again. *Never!*” she added, as with a forcible gesture she emphasized the forcible words. “Listen to me,” she went on, taking it again tenderly, as though to put away the suspicion and the guilt together, “when I tell you that the disgrace which you talk about, and of which I shall never believe that even a shadow has fallen upon you, is as nothing to the disgrace which would attach to the name of one who was too great a coward to support the misery of a life which God had given him to hold like a man. My standard of honour differs from yours only in this—I believe it to be

in your own keeping—and that only an act of your own can sully it. Keep these dear hands clean from such an act as that,” she said, letting her hot tears fall on them, and clasping her own slender fingers round his, strong sinewed, firmly knit but less emphatic in purpose than hers then, “and I will never let them go. You know what I have promised, John, and nothing that you have told me yet shall come between me and my word.”

The iron bound soil was broken up now, the broad chest heaved painfully, and sobs shook the frame of the strong man, as though he had been indeed a very child.

“God bless you, my darling,” he said at last. “Your noble words have taught me how great was the sin I contemplated, and how deeply I might have injured you. But it is all dark to me here, Mary. I suppose that I have broken down. You must take me away, my dear ; I was going

to say home. God forgive me, *I have no home.*"

The last words were uttered in the far-away unfamiliar voice, which wrung Mary's heart like the cry of a wounded life. He was, as he had said, broken down, and the blow which had been aimed with such bitter and relentless purpose, had struck deep in a vital part. He was not mad, as one less lovingly acute than Mary, might have imagined from his manner and look. He had come back *home* to King's Baynard, as a wounded animal hies back to the old familiar thicket, and with the death dart in his heaving side to die. He had accepted what he called his disgrace, as he would have accepted the blow of an assassin, without a word or a sign of pain—doggedly, as it would have appeared to one not vitally interested; nobly, as some might have pronounced it; naturally, as we say

who have known him of old, and have seen how he kept a bold front to the world, under circumstances that would have crushed a less buoyant nature in the dust.

He had possessed that God-like reticence which makes men great, combined with the ardent temperament which makes them beloved of their fellow-men; and, low as he conceived himself to have fallen, in the unreasoning conviction that he was a disgraced man, he could still have maintained the position which he had gained as the reputed heir of King's Baynard, in the respect and the affection of all who had honoured him, as the worthy representative of a disgraced house. He who had been proud in most things, had been humble in this—he had believed it to be his mission to restore the lustre to the name of Baynard, and he had looked upon all the advantages of person and fortune which

had been bestowed upon him with an open hand, as a mere means to an end. No one had ever merged his own identity more completely in a cause than he had done, and now that the very corner-stone of the edifice he had been building with so much care, was shattered and removed, he seemed to have lost his belief in the integrity of his own purpose, and to look upon the lie and the imposition in the same light, as though it had emanated from his own brain.

Tortured, as only an honourable mind can understand torture, by such a conviction as this, his moral nature had broken away from her moorings, and he had even been driven to the very verge of guilt, from which he had been saved by some unseen, but powerful agency acting on his will for good. Some equally merciful Providence had forecast that apparently chance meeting between

him, and one who had proved to him indeed, a guardian angel at the very turning point of his future destiny.

With incipient fever burning in his veins, and with the effects of three days and nights of fasting and mental torture telling upon his frame, he might indeed, without such an interposition, have been given over to the teeth of the spirit of evil, which was striving hard for the mastery within. Mary Trevylian had pronounced the noble and daring sentence which had brought the truth with unflinching severity, even to his dim and darkening mind. She had branded the contemplated act, of which he had spoken, as the act of a coward in the sight of God and man; she had severed, with keen incisive stroke, the true from the false meaning of the word, disgrace. She had rejected it with indignation, as applied to the accidents of destiny; she had counted

as little, what he had believed to be the loss of all. He had concealed nothing from her of the revelation made to himself by the wicked baronet—excepting what affected the honour of his dead mother, and that the rack would not have wrung from him, for he believed it to be as false as the lips that uttered it—and she had never removed her hand from his, but had pressed closer to his side, when he disclosed to her who and what he was.

It was not until he had gone on to tell her of his own rash rising against the hand of God, and to utter words of disbelief in the existence of an over-ruling Providence, that she let the nobility and loftiness of her own nature find words to express the deep sense which she entertained of the disgrace of such an act as that. He was at last completely worn out, and, turning towards Mary, with

a worn, haggard look, that it stung her heart to see, he said,

“I will go home now, and lie down ; I must have rest before I can begin to think.”

“I wish you would come to the Rectory,” said Mary, pleadingly, “I cannot bear to think that you will be alone at King’s Baynard, and ill.”

A shudder passed over him at the mention of the familiar name, as he replied, “No, my darling, I cannot face him now. I will come down to the Rectory, by and bye. I will give you the promise your eyes are asking,” he added, stooping down to kiss her on the forehead ; “my own act shall never forfeit your love. I feel in a dream, or a stupor. I suppose I am tired. Will you walk with me ?”

Mary’s only reply was to entwine her arm fondly in his, and to prepare gladly to leave the spot, while the great hound

who had been lying in a contemplative mood, with his head resting upon his paws, also rose slowly from his lair, and preceded them at a stately pace.

“I must send the Doctor to you, at once, John; it is breaking my heart to see you looking like this,” Mary said, at last, as she noticed the utter exhaustion expressed in every movement, and in the deadly pallor of his face, which made her fear every moment that he would either fall or faint.

“I would rather not see any one,” he replied, “if I am as ill as you think, Mary, I shall die; and no one need ever know that I played the part down at King’s Baynard of an ‘impostor, a charlatan, and a sham.’ Do you think that I could recognize the truth of those words, and care much to live? and, oh my darling! what misery have I brought upon *you*.”

“Yes, when you talk like this; when you make me think that you can grieve so much for King’s Baynard, when you have me, and when you have *him* still. Oh John! you do not know how that old man’s heart is bound up in you, and surely he has suffered enough. I shall send the Doctor whether you forbid it or not, for my sake and for his. You need not talk to him of family secrets; and my lips, of course, are sealed.”

“It matters but little, Mary, and I am a fool to care. If I die, the secret will not die with me, for I have enemies even down here; and if I live, no one will hear of me again, but under a name which it is no dishonour to bear.”

His eye was already scanning the horizon of a future, in which King’s Baynard had no place. The roots of what had been until now the deepest love (but

one) in his soul, lay upturned by the fury of the storm which had broken over his head, and the very soil seemed to reproach him with his alien blood.

“I am King’s Baynard’s,” we have once heard him exultingly say, and his love for his inheritance had become, indeed, a part of his very being. But already he had begun to look beyond it, for even if he should live, henceforward it could be nothing to him

CHAPTER VI.


“In aught that tries the heart, how few withstand the proof.” — CHILDE HAROLD.

MARGARET TOWN-EDEN had ridden over to Vavasour to enquire after the health of its mistress and her infant child, on the day after “young John’s” return to King’s Baynard, and his terrible interview with Mary under the old Standard Oak in the Park. She was rather late in returning from her ride, and she ran directly up stairs to prepare for dinner, which was served at Killerton in those days, at the early hour of six, in summer, and of five in winter, excepting when the Squire or the boys were hunting, in which

case, unlimited grace was given to accommodate the most inveterate sportsman among them.

"We must wait for Meg," said the Squire, who idolized his only daughter, as that young lady's appearance was delayed some minutes after the announcement of the butler "that dinner was on the table;" and as the Squire was never known to wait for any one else, there was an outcry on the part of the six brothers, in different stages of hoble-de-hoy-hood and by whom the laws of chivalry, especially as applied to a sister, were either ignored, or unknown.

"Come, my darling," said her father as she entered the room, which was the family sitting room at Killerton, and called by courtesy "the library," although a stranger inclined to cavil might have asked, "where are the books?" "I think these boys will devour one another if they



are not fed soon. I am sure they cannot often complain of having to wait for *you*. How went the mare? and what was the report of Mrs. Vavasour, my dear?"

"Jocunda was very fresh, papa, and I gave her a gallop which made me late. Mrs. Vavasour was going on as well as possible, and sent her love to me by her maid."

"You seem tired, child," Mrs. Town-Eden observed; as Margaret pushed away her plate, and, as her teasing brothers remarked, seemed inclined to quarrel with her bread and butter. "I think Jocunda is too much for you this hot weather. You look as pale as a ghost. Be quiet, boys, and don't tease your sister. Can't you see that she is not in the humour for it?"

This remark was backed by a very sharp reproof from the Squire; (who never allowed any one to tease Margaret but

himself) and the hobble-de-hoys silenced, but not subdued, made private signals to one another, expressive of pretended awe.

“Don’t be angry with them, papa, they don’t tease me in the least; but I have a headache, and I don’t think I want any dinner. I’ll go and lie down a little till you come, mamma,” she said, rising at the same time, and looking at her mother, on whom that half implied invitation not to be long, was not likely to be thrown away.

Mrs. Town-Eden’s great love for her daughter, had once led her into great injustice towards one who she believed had injured her; but in itself it was a very genuine and admirable feeling, and there was a confidence and easiness of intercourse between the mother and child, more like that which generally exists between sisters of an unequal age. Poor Margaret’s heart

was aching to impart to some kindred spirit the burden of the news which she had heard that day, and she could not do it in public, or bring up a subject at the dinner-table, which had been tacitly tabooed for many months. Directly she and her mother were alone in the snug room, called Mrs. Town-Eden's dressing room, (no one knew why, for she never dressed there, from which the boys were rigidly excluded and in which papa himself was only a privileged intruder), she put her hand into her mother's and said. "Do you know, mamma, that I have heard something to-day which has shocked me very much. 'Young John' (Mr. Baynard, I suppose I ought to call him ; but the other comes so naturally) is very ill, I believe in great danger ; for they have sent for another doctor to-day."

"My dear child, surely you must be mistaken," replied Mrs. Town-Eden with

a start; "it is the last thing I should have thought of, why, my dear, he is a perfect Hercules. Who told you he was ill?"

"I'll tell you how it was," Margaret said, raising herself on her elbow on the sofa cushion over which her beautiful hair was scattered in careless confusion; she never indeed looked prettier than she did at that moment. "I was riding back the short way from Vavasour, that cut, you know, through the park at King's Baynard which we used to go so often; it saves three miles round, and there is no reason why I should not go there *now*." She added this last sentence with the slightest possible curl of her upper lip. "Jocunda was pulling my arms off too, and I thought a good gallop down the grass ride, would quiet her."

"Well!" put in Mrs Town-Eden, as Margaret paused at this stage in her narrative, as though she were waiting for

some such sign that the rest was being anxiously anticipated.

“ Well, just as I got to the lodge gates, I saw Mary Trevylian on the other side of them, in earnest conversation with old Dr. Blake. I would have turned back if they had not seen me, and have kept ‘ the boys’ waiting for their food,” she said with a sparkle of her usual fun ; “ but the mare was fidgetty, and the lodge-keeper could not come out, and I was as cross as possible, kept there like a bird in a trap, until Mary Trevylian came forward with such a sweet expression on her face, although it was sad, and said, ‘ Let me do it for you, pray,’ and when she opened the great heavy gate herself, and patted Jocunda on the neck, which was covered with foam flakes, my heart went out to her all at once. I made Jocunda stand then, while I asked after her Uncle, old Mr. Trevylian, and she said he was as

well as usual ; but as she looked up I saw that she had been crying, and then she said half shyly, and with a quivering lip, 'I suppose you have not heard that Mr. Baynard is very ill. Dr. Blake has just been telling me that he has sent one of the grooms into Elminster, for Dr. Quintain to come out at once.'

"I am afraid I was rather abrupt, for I only said, no, I had not heard ; but that I was very sorry, and all the proper conventional things, for it came hard to me, at first, that she should tell *me*, not that I had any right to feel it so. That is one thing I want particularly to say to you now, mamma," she went on with an effort. "I know what it is that you think you ought to resent for me, and what I have allowed you to fancy too long—tacitly of course—but there are subjects in which silence is in itself a deceit. You never had anything to resent for me ; I was so

foolish as to deceive myself once, and to listen to nonsense that was told me by others; but Mr. Baynard *never deceived me himself*. He never said a single word to me that admitted of any other interpretation, than that of simple friendship. I can see it now, although I was wilfully blind then. I need not tell you that this conviction has cured me long ago," she added, with a flash of her own spirit shining in her eyes; "but I am very, very sorry for him, and for Mary Trevylian, and I should like to go to her to-morrow and be some comfort to her, if I might."

"Of course you shall do as you like, my love," answered the mother tenderly, and playing with the pretty hair as she spoke; "it is so like you to forget and forgive."

"Oh! mamma, do not say *forgive*, after what I have just told you," the girl said, looking for a moment reproachfully at the

woman whose nature had in it more tenderness, but less nobility than her own. "I have no one to forgive, and nothing to forget, for no one ever knew that I once made a fool myself, or was in love with a man by mistake, for just one quarter of an hour or so," she added, in her sprightliest tone—for she felt intuitively that her mother could not rise to the nobility of her serious confession—and indeed she was very glad herself that it was over, and done with. "I will tell papa when he comes up," she said, after a few moments pause, "just as I would tell him any other news, and then he will take it for granted that 'young John' and King's Baynard need not be forbidden subjects any longer at Killerton. I don't know, for my part, why they ever were."

They were not likely to be tabooed subjects long at Killerton or elsewhere, for soon the whole county rang with the

news that some terrible calamity had fallen upon the head of the heir of King's Baynard, the new member for West Deresfordshire.

Some said he had been disinherited by Sir Marmaduke on the grounds of his intended marriage with Miss Trevelyian, and this indeed was the report which found the greatest acceptance amongst the feminine part of the community. Others maintained that Sir Marmaduke was a ruined man, and that he had sent for his son to inform him, that he was the heir to beggary as well as disgrace, and that King's Baynard and the vast estates belonging to it were already in the market. But on one subject all were agreed, and, indeed, it was the only one on which positive information was attainable, and that was the severe and dangerous illness, of the reputed heir himself. Dr. Quintain shook his head ominously when questioned on

the subject; but nothing could be wrung from his lips which could throw any light upon the cause of this sudden and unaccountable illness.

Mary had besought him with tears in her eyes, not to satisfy the curiosity of the Elminster gossips in the slightest particular, with regard to his patient's state either of mind or body. "It is our secret, *my* secret, Doctor," she said, as she followed him to the drawing-room door at the Rectory, in which he had performed the painful task of opening her loving eyes to the danger which threatened the man she loved with all the devotion of her single nature. "You will not betray *us*."

"My dear child," the Doctor had replied to her tenderly, "I have nothing to betray. Mr. Baynard has confided no secret to my keeping—and one in my profession is blind, and deaf, and dumb, to what passes in a sick room, or to the revelations of a

delirious brain. One thing I would advise you, my dear; give strict orders to the housekeeper to let no gossiping women servants within ear-shot of his room. Sick men will talk you know, and women too. I will have no one enter his room but Saunders, Dr. Blake, and myself. You had better see to this. I shall come over again to-night, as much to see you as Mr. Baynard; for if you go on fretting at this pace, I shall have another patient before long I see. How is your Uncle?"

This question was asked abruptly, and to give time to the Doctor to recover the self-possession which he had only maintained with an effort, for he had but little hope himself of his patient's life, and his heart was bleeding for the weight of the blow about to fall on one innocent loving head.

"Uncle Gilbert is as well as we can expect," answered Mary, wearily; "we do not tell him all—he could not bear it.

Oh! Dr. Quintain, how long will this suspense last?"

"Not long, my dear, not long, keep up, and you shall see him soon! but he would never forgive us if we were to let a lady see him till he is shaved and trim." With this grim attempt at a joke, Dr. Quintain left the room, saying to himself as he got into his carriage, "God forgive me for that lie! Poor child! poor child!"

CHAPTER VII.

“Bankrupt in fortune and reputation.”

SHERIDAN.

CARLOTTA, LADY BAYNARD, was a prey to remorse. She had tampered with the springs of evil, and they had suddenly closed upon the fate of one, whom at the eleventh hour, she had learnt to pity, if not to love. She could not undo her work; it was now too late, and this she had felt as she caught a glimpse of “young John’s” rigid face, as he left Sir Marmaduke’s room. She had placed herself in his path, and even held out her hand to hinder him in his way, a hand

which closed upon something which she would not have let Mr. Luke Grimstone have seen, for the value of the stakes for which she had played into his hands—and which she had just won. The inheritance of King's Baynard for her own child, the little Marmaduke.

Her remorse was the greater, because she honestly believed herself to have been the originator and prime mover in a plot, which it had taken subtler brains than her own to ripen into diabolical fruit; she had recognized no other end or aim in the humiliation of “young John,” than the enriching and aggrandizement of her own son; and she firmly believed that she, and she only, had worked the downfall and ruin of the latter, by her influence over Sir Marmaduke, and her power over his confidential agent—our old acquaintance, Mr. Nathaniel Lines. It was he who had put it into the baronet's power so artfully to

entwine fiction and truth, with regard to the mysterious fate of the unhappy girl, who, in an evil hour, seemed to have drawn the whole weight of the Baynard curse upon her comparatively innocent head. It was he who had worked late and early, in concert with Mr. Luke Grimstone, to tie the future destiny of the man whom they both hated, into a knot of mystery and disgrace, which might never be unravelled by mortal tongue—an issue for which they had both worked with a determination worthier of a better cause, and in which they had been aided and abetted by the very woman who now repented it, with unavailing but bitter remorse. All the conspirators, however, had over-shot their mark—the final move had been forced upon Sir Marmaduke by “young John’s” own eagerness to clear his dead mother’s reputation from the shadow of a stain, before his marriage with

Mary Trevelyian took place. His false pretensions to the inheritance which he had innocently usurped, was not to have been revealed to him during the life-time of his reputed father.

The will was to have disclosed it and to have proclaimed Marmaduke the heir, at one and the same moment. "Unless," and on this clause Sir Marmaduke had insisted with all the obstinacy of his nature, "the reputed elder son would bind himself to celibacy for life, in which case he was to retain unmolested possession of King's Baynard, and the guardianship of the infant heir."

If unity is strength in a good cause, it is the absolute element of a bad one; and if either of "young John's" enemies could have foreseen the defalcation of the one who appeared to be most vitally interested, at the last moment, they might have doubted of the expediency of carry-

ing into execution a plot, of which the foundation-stones were falsehood, robbery, and wrong.

If Lady Baynard could have spoken to "young John," or if she could have forced upon his notice the paper which she held in her hand, the evil work of days, of weeks, of months, might have been neutralised and undone. Rashly impulsive, she would have betrayed herself then, and he might have been spared the ordeal of anguish which was bringing him to the gate of death. He had passed her, however, without a sign or a glance of recognition. He had been literally stunned by the purport of the words which had been uttered with a bitter intensity, which had blasted the sources and the channel through which which they came, and which had proved the last words of a tongue as cruel and relentless as the grave.

Lady Baynard's hastily-formed resolve had borne no fruit. She turned back with a cry on her lips, and entered the room which the man whose ruin she now knew to have been accomplished, had just left. There reigned a silence never to be broken again; truth and justice were avenged, while innocence looked wonderingly on the work of doom. It was a spectacle on which we will not look. The wife and the mother fled from it, with her frightened child in her arms, while a new terror took possession of her soul.

"It is the vengeance of God!" she said, in Italian, and sank down, white and trembling, while the nurse hastened to relieve her of the child. Conscience, which had long slept in her bosom, had awoke into life in her turbulent soul; and, during the weeks and months that the miserable man lingered in a

living death, a purpose grew and strengthened in her mind, which was running a tortoise race with the fleet-footed destroyer, which it would scarcely be in time to rob of its prey. "Young John" was making a good fight of it, and dying, if he were to die, hard. His matchless constitution asserted its own, and kept death in the garb of disease at bay. But the enemy seemed still to be at work underground, advancing on the citadel by some secret passage, which set the watchmen on the walls at defiance.

"There is nothing the matter with him, and yet I believe him to be a dying man," Dr. Quintain had remarked to the humbler practitioner, who liked to call the confidential talk he had with the great man from Elminster, over his bottle of Port and his Stilton cheese, a consultation, and who talked largely to his other patients,

fortunate enough to have ailments at that particular time, when so much might be going on worth hearing at King's Baynard, of "the opinion of Dr. Quintain and myself."

"The malady is one of the mind, I fear," he went on to say. "I have seen one such case only before."

"And how did it end, Sir?" asked Dr. Blake, pouring himself out another glass of such wine as had seldom gladdened his heart during his professional career.

"Fatally," said the great authority, and there were tears in his eyes as he said the word, for he was thinking of one whom he always called now when he spoke of her, "the poor little girl."

"It's a sad business," he added after a moment's silence, a sad ending to the election triumph. What a glorious fellow he was!"

"If you do not think him likely to

mend, ought we not to let her see him?" This was the first suggestion upon which Dr. Blake had ventured, and it was prompted by the humanity which, in another form, had acted upon his superior, to keep the two anxious aching hearts apart.

"I suppose we ought," the latter answered with a sigh; "but we will wait a day or two, for I do not apprehend anything immediate. It will be a terrible shock to her, poor little girl."

"She would bear it better if she could see him," courageously persisted the man, who from this speech we may presume saw the deepest into the intricacies of the feminine heart.

"Do you think so? Then let her see him by all means. I would only have spared her pain as long as I could, and as for him, I should like to see him *feel*. That numbness is the worst symptom I notice.

It is very remarkable with him, nothing seems to affect him in the least."

"I am not so sure of that, Sir. I saw him wince twice under your probe this morning—especially when you said that we could not afford to lose the most popular man in the county, and that Miss Trevylian had a good excuse for being proud of her future husband."

"I was trying to prick him then, I own. For if that is *true* which we must both more than suspect, I must have gone pretty near a nerve then. It's a terrible old house this." Dr. Quintain added with a shudder, "I wish my poor little darling had stayed quietly at home, at Brackenlea."

"King's Baynard is a fine place too, a very fine place," said Dr. Blake rubbing his hands together, put on his mettle for the locality in which he had been born and

bred. "And 'young John' is one that any girl might be proud of, be he who, or what he may," he said significantly.

Indeed, by such hints only did the two men convey to one another, that the secret to which Mary had so pathetically alluded in her speech to Dr. Quintain, on the first night of his attendance at King's Baynard, was in their keeping. That it was safe in their hands, none who knew the honourable nature of both would have doubted for a moment.

"Shall you be here again to-night, Sir?" asked Dr. Blake of the great man, as the two came out of the patient's room, with countenances that told too plainly the bitter tale, "*no hope.*"

"I will, if it be any satisfaction to you or to anyone; but I tell you honestly, I can't be of the slightest use."

"You will call at the Rectory as you go by, then?" humbly suggested Dr. Blake.

“ No, not this morning; I really have not time, and I can't face her—that's the truth.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“Death hath so many doors to let out life.”

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

“**T**HREE *happy, happy* days,” were the last words quoted from the simple record of a young life, which lies before me in the early journal of Mary Trevylian. I must here borrow from it again, to tell of the anxious days passed in watching and waiting, sometimes in patient hope, but oftener in the agonizing realization of a still greater sorrow to come. For that promised interview did not take place on the morrow as promised; the patient had again sunk into a sort of lethargy or stupor, in which it was deemed advisable

by both doctors that, for her own sake, she should not see him, and she was obliged to reconcile herself to wait. Of her Uncle's state during those hours and days, which passed with leaden wings over her weary head, we will give her own account—it is a touching one, and has the witness of truth in itself, which can only be attained by the pencil that paints from the quick, and that lays on the colours while the tints are still living and warm.

“I have very little hope; I can write no more to day,”

Is the only record that marks the day following the one on which Dr. Blake performed the painful task, of what is called breaking the truth. The words themselves look to me like a scar on the wide space which they appropriate on a leaf, which shows white amongst the thickly written pages of the book, when

hey are turned over with a hasty hand. They are dragged painfully and unevenly from one side to the other, and are running down like the hopes of life.

In the next record dated three days later, we find—"He is indeed a shade better to-day; but as the doctors admit this with their lips, they do not speak any comfort to me with their eyes. I *dare* not believe that there is any real amendment, for to keep my hopes at the lowest ebb is my only safe-guard against breaking my heart. I never felt the truth of those words before, and now I feel them in all their bitterness for him and for myself. It is well for me that I have so much to do, and another to deceive, for *I cannot deceive myself*. I have no heart to write, for a fearful doubt has taken possession of me. Why are the doctors so grave when they tell me he is better? Ought I to pray for that dear life which is pass-

ing away from me without a sign? My burden seems greater than I can bear."

"I wrote this yesterday, and to-day a new life has sprung up within me, for the good Doctor has congratulated me with tears running down his cheeks, as he took me by the hand, and said the blessed words 'he will do well.' There seemed to me a hidden meaning in the very turn of them, giving the lie to the terrible suspicion of yesterday. He will do well, thank God! thank God! I write these words with tears, which are of joy, staining the paper and blotting out the words; but it is no matter, for they are written on my heart. Oh! the dear, dear life that is coming back to me. I must leave off here, to thank the God of mercy on my knees, for the compassion he has shown to us this day; and then I must fly to Uncle Gilbert, the dear old man, who must share this joy with me."

“I have been with him for an hour or more, and it is touching to see how he kindled when I repeated to him Dr. Quintain’s words, for he must have suspected how anxious we all were about his ‘dear lad,’ although he seldom questioned me; but only ‘looked in my face until my heart was like to break,’ as the song says so truly. How little does Uncle Gilbert guess the relationship between himself and John, and yet nature seems to have spoken of it, and to have knit his heart to him by a strong mysterious tie. Poor Mabel! her’s was indeed an unhappy fate, and a mystery of mysteries to me, for I can see no motive for Sir Marmaduke’s black-hearted villainy.” (“Young John” had not profaned Mary’s ear with the history of the wicked Baronet’s own version of the motive, the reader will recollect.)

“I cannot help wondering, now I have time to think, how it will all end; but I

shall soon know, for John will not remain here a day after he is able to leave King's Baynard. I know him well enough for that, and I am prouder of him than I ever was, nameless and dishonoured as he believes himself to be. I shall be prouder to be his wife now, than when his was the most honoured name in the county, and I was believed to be the most fortunate girl. Margaret Town-Eden's is a noble nature, she came to me again to-day, and I love her for it, for I read her secret in her eyes the day I first told her of his illness and danger. Mrs. Vavasour had, indeed, hinted it to me once before. How, indeed, could she help herself, thrown as she was so constantly with him? I should be the last to blame her; on the contrary, I admire her as much as I love her, and she has made herself dearer to me than I can say.

“Now I must go to bed and to sleep;

to sleep, at last, on the sweet thought of to-morrow, for to-morrow I am to see him. Oh, my dear, dear love, may your rest to-night be as tranquil, and as full of peace as mine !”

“Who can say what the morrow will bring forth? I was so happy when I wrote those words last night; and now I have seen him, my hand has lain in his, and yet my heart is very sad; for I see a change in him which I cannot describe, but which fully accounts to me for the grave looks of the doctors. He seems so terribly calm, so very far away, as if he had some strong purpose in his heart which he does not confide even to me, and which is killing him by its strength and intensity. I must write down the few precious words which passed between us, for God only knows how precious they may be before long.

“The shock was so great to me, when I first saw him so altered, and with an expression in his eyes which I had never seen before, even on that last terrible day, that I could not refrain from crying, although I had promised myself to be calm for his sake.

“‘Oh, John!’ I said, for I was the first to speak; ‘is this what they call doing well?’ and I took his dear, thin hand, and pressed it to my lips. ‘What must you not have suffered to have come to this.’

“‘It is well for us to suffer sometimes, Mary,’ he answered, speaking so tenderly, but with such a deadly calm, ‘If I ever rise from this bed, it will be as a better man. Strong natures require strong heat to test them, and the furnace I have passed through is a fiery one, darling. Since I have been lying here, I have thought a great deal, more than I ever thought before in my life. Will you tell *him* this,

Mary,' he said, pressing my hand, 'it will prepare him to hear what we shall have to tell him soon, to know that I accept my destiny from God's hands, and that I have learnt a life's lesson, lying here on what I believed to be a dying bed.'

" 'Oh, John !' I exclaimed, interrupting him, 'you thought that you were dying, and you never asked for me? And I was so near at hand, breaking my heart for you, alone;' and I believe I sank down on my knees by the bed, and, hiding my face, cried like a foolish child.

" 'Mary,' he said, 'darling ! it is killing me to think what I have brought upon you. Every precious tear you shed is one drop more of misery in my cup. You must be strong for me, now, my dear, for I am weaker than water for myself.'

"He said this with a heavy sigh; and

in that piteous way he has with me now of calling me 'my dear,' like one years and years older than myself, speaking from a distant height.

" 'You will promise to send for me, if you ever have such feelings again. You will let me be a comfort to you,' I said, 'Uncle Gilbert does, and it has been the feeling that he has been resting on me, that has kept me up through these terrible days.'

" 'Resting on *you*?' he answered; and there was a shadow of one of his old flashes in his eyes as he said it. 'Oh, God! that it should have come to this! My gentle, beautiful darling, that I should live to lean my cruel weight upon you!'

He was getting so earnest now, that I was afraid for him; and I said, in a different tone: 'It is not so much now, John, I wish you would make haste and make it a

little more. I shall not grumble at an additional stone or two, I assure you ; and as for the dear old man, I believe him to be lighter than I ; so I am not so over-weighted as you seem to imagine.'

" ' Women never are, when they are bearing the burdens of others,' he said, thoughtfully. ' Oh Mary ! how happy we might have been !'

" ' How happy we shall be,' I replied ; and he looked at me with a puzzled expression in his eyes. He seems always to talk as if there were an invisible barrier between us ; as though we could never be more to each other than we are. This makes me so wretched, for I believe he still thinks of himself as a dying man.

" Here our interview, our precious interview came to an end. Dr. Quintain said that he had talked too much, when he saw the flush on his face, and the fire in his eyes. But he laughed, and said, ' Not

too much, Doctor, not half enough, for I have a great deal to say.'

"The Doctor would not laugh with him, I noticed; but he looked grave, and said, 'I must ask this young lady to retire, and to send Mrs. Grimstone with what I ordered, at once.'

" 'No,' he cried, in such a terrible voice, that I trembled to hear it, and the Doctor actually put me out of the room, for I was too frightened to move or stir. 'I did not expect this,' I heard him say to Dr. Blake, when he came to the door a few minutes after; and then the door was shut upon me again, and I was left to cry my eyes out in the dismal old room: *the* room in which he has spent so many lonely hours, in which I find that he spent the whole of that most miserable night. No wonder that he broke down—my poor, poor love! No wonder that temptation should have come to him even in the

terrible guise it did—it must have been an awful night.

“Mrs. Grimstone came to me as I was sitting alone, and although my soul recoiled from her, I remembered who she was, and I pitied her, as I saw how her hands trembled, and how full she seemed of grief and perturbation—grief which was but a natural instinct, and perturbation, caused no doubt, by her knowledge of some of the secrets which seem to haunt this miserable house. Oh! King’s Baynard, I know now that it was never *you* that I loved. Now it seems to me like a tomb, where his happiness lies buried, and where mine will too, I sometimes think, when hope fails me and I fear that he will die. Mrs. Grimstone talked to me for some time. She tried to make me suggest some cause for the illness, which seems so unaccountable to those who took leave of him in the pride of health and strength. Certainly

illness was the last thing that would have occurred to me in connection with him; and now his hands are so thin and whiter than mine, those hands whose strength he used to boast of—my poor, poor love!

“When I came back home to the Rectory I was very tired, and I had no heart to go to Uncle Gilbert to give him an account of our interview, so I went to lie down for an hour before doing so, and then I seemed refreshed. Poor, dear old man! he looked so eargerly at me as I went in, and I had so little that was cheering to tell him: the only message that I had to give, seemed to me so much like a message from the grave. ‘Since he has been lying there he has thought a great deal,’ Uncle, he wished me to tell you—‘that he has accepted his destiny from God’s hands; and learnt a life’s lesson from what he believed to be a dying bed.’ For I was bound to deliver his message

faithfully, although it cost me a pang ; for somehow, that last sentence will find an echo in my own heart, and since I have seen him, I feel again afraid to hope.

“ ‘ Was that *all*, Mabel ?’

“ ‘ All he told me to tell you, dear Uncle,’ I replied. It was, perhaps, an equivocation, but why should the dear old man bear the burden of a secret which is weighing so hard upon one he loves so well ; a secret which belongs to him, and which I had no right (even if I had the inclination) to reveal. He looked puzzled for a moment, and then taking my hand tenderly and looking at me wistfully as he has only looked lately, he said,

“ ‘ Nothing has come between you, child. Nothing that you have kept back from me has happened of that sort ? I charge you not to deceive me in this.’

“ ‘ Nothing but death will ever come between us,’ I said almost mechani-

cally, and *that* would only part us for a little time."

"'You are sure,' he asked once again without releasing my hand.

"'I am sure,' I replied, and then he seemed satisfied; but relapsed into that dreamy sort of state into which he so often falls now, and I heard him mutter to himself. 'It is the shadow of the Baynard curse. I had prayed that it might spare him.'

"Poor dear Uncle Gilbert! I believe that it would relieve his mind to know that the curse of which he has a morbid dread, is not the inheritance of his "dear lad;" and yet he is so bound up in the idea of his retrieving the family honour, that he clings fondly to the name, which has for so many years been only known as a by-word for disgrace, and the contempt of all honourable men.

"To how much misery does one false step

lead, and what an entanglement of shame has poor Mabel Trevelyian managed to weave around the fate of those who loved her. I cannot bear to look at the beautiful face smiling on me from the wall, and think of all the ruin it has worked in this house, and in that. If she had not died so long ago, and if she had not been *his* mother, I could hate her for the wrong she has done.

“Poor Gilly died to-day.

“He raised his head for a minute, and said, ‘Hark!’ as he heard the hoofs of a horse in the distance—but the step he was listening for he will never hear again.

“Poor Gilly! it seemed to me like an evil omen when Dr. Blake told me you were *dead*.”

CHAPTER IX.

“Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds.
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me proved,
 I never writ, and no man ever loved.”

SHAKESPERE.

WEEKS wore away, and there was little apparent change in the state of things at King's Baynard. “Young John” continued to amend (if that could be called amending which presented none of the palpable landmarks of convalescence) so slowly, that the most sanguine of his well-wishers began to lose heart, and those who like Mary were too vitally interested

to be hopeful without cause, began to feel that dull stagnation of the emotions, which is as regards the nobler part, like the physical apathy which precedes the dissolution of the body. She had ceased to look forward, she only lived for the hour; she was afraid to cast even a hasty look down that vista that had once opened upon her, bathed in the summer sunlight, and rich with the harvest of a future day. She was very calm, very quiet, very sad, when she was not with him; but no one would have thought to look at her, that the fabric of her life which fairy hands had so lately built into a palace whose gates were of crystal, and whose pavement of gold, lay shattered at her feet. She bore herself very bravely for his sake, who had even more to bear, so she told herself, although she would add with a sigh. "It is as hard for me, for his sake."

They were very much together on those still summer days (for spring had emerged into the "leafy month," and he was still "about the same,") and he was able to get about a little, and to walk on the sunny lawn, in front of the West Wing, with the aid of Mary's arm and a stick. But he was very soon tired, too tired even to talk, and then he would sit and think with Mary's hand in his, until it seemed as though he were dreaming the remainder of his life away. After one long hour spent in such a reverie, during which Mary worked quietly at his side, while Talbot, the faithful hound, lay solemnly at their feet; he broke out in accents so like those which she had feared never to hear again, that Mary started and turned pale.

"I cannot go on like this, Mary. I must shake off this unaccountable languor

and make up my mind to act. You know what I mean, my dear. This place I seem to loath now, in the same proportion that I loved it once. The farce has been played out, and it is time that the stage was cleared. Some steps must be taken at once. It is killing me to remain here, and I have only been waiting for strength enough to throw up the cards, and do what I must do as an honourable man—reveal to the world that I have been ‘the shameless herald of a lie’—that I have acted the part down at King’s Baynard of ‘an impostor, a charlatan, and a sham.’”

As he said the words which seemed to have burnt into his very brain, Mary saw what she had only once seen before, and which she knew not whether she should hail as a good, or dread as an evil omen—tears in his eyes and on his face, not the tempest tears of childhood or passion,

but tears that seemed to gather slowly and fall reluctantly, as blood drips drop by drop from the deep wound which is sapping away the life, when the great arteries which it has divided are drained and almost dry.

There was silence between them for some minutes, and then the faithful little hand, so fair in form, and so sensitive in action and grace, stole fondly into that which ought to have been the stronger, while the gentle accents of womanly love and comfort fell like balm upon the weary heart, and sealed the fountain of the bitter spring.

“John,” they said, “I have been thinking of this for some time. You will never get well here, something tells me so, with this terrible secret hanging over our heads. It is killing you as you said just now, and the sooner you can leave King’s Baynard the better. I

am glad that you have said the word."

"And leave you here, Mary?"

There was a shadow of reproach in the inflection of his voice, as "young John" answered her by implying a question, which it was hard for her to hear without flinching, or swerving from the path which she had marked out for herself to pursue. She was no coward, however, and she answered firmly, but sadly, "And leave me, but for a time only. I could part with you, John, for your own good—even if it broke my heart—but it will not do that. It would break my heart if you were to remain here and die; but not if you only go to come back for me when you are strong and well again, and when, what now troubles you, shall have passed away like a miserable dream; as it will pass away, when you have learnt to look upon it in another light—in the right light; when you have learnt that dishonour can

never attach itself to the name which *you* bear, whatever that name may be," she added, proudly, and with a light in her fine earnest eyes, before which any mean, or ignoble thing, must have shrunk, shrivelled and blasted away.

"You do not know all, Mary; you do not know that dishonour is my inheritance, and disgrace my only birthright. I would not profane your ears by telling you what they have dared to say of my mother—slander which I have no power to refute—which if I believed in," he added, with a fervour of passion, which made the fire sparks rain from his eyes, and which gave to his wasted hand the nervous tension and force of former days, "I would believe in neither Heaven nor Hell, in the purity of woman, nor in the mercy of God. You have thought me a weak fool to be almost killed by the loss of a name, and of King's Baynard—but I have lost more

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than these. I have lost faith in the memory of my mother. If you knew all that it had been to me, Mary—how it had kept me from evil and in the right path when temptations were on every side—how it had grown up with me a palpable thing—how I had revered, worshipped, adored it—how it had been to me in the silent night, as boy and man, like the sweeping of an angel's wing—how, when I had built up an honourable name, on the very ruins of a shameful past, I could say, *mother*, it is all for your sake; you would pity me, child; you would even forgive me that the one great love of my life should not have swept away all else before it; and that prouder than a monarch in your sweet, pure love, that I should be dying of a mother's shame."

"You *must not die!* Oh! John, have you *no* pity? Did you win me to love

you only for this? To sacrifice me to the memory of a dream? Have I borne nights of watching, and days of weary anguish and waiting, and the burden of *two* lives for this? Oh! John, if you knew what I have suffered, but no word of it has passed my lips."

Poor child! it was the cry of pain that escaped her lips now, from which no word of complaint had hitherto been wrung, although, as she pathetically expressed it, the burden of two lives had been pressing their weight upon her own young brave spirit, and leant upon her for rest. Her Uncle Gilbert and her affianced husband had both been unconsciously, but not the less surely, resting the burden of their own sorrows upon her; and now he spoke these cruel words, as though, as she expressed it, she had not suffered enough to make him spare her the crowning pang of all—to feel

that she was less to him than the memory of a mother he had never known.

Her own appeal, wrung from her, by the sharpness of the pain she had endured, was not without its effect; it aroused "young John" from the lethargy in which he seemed steeped, with regard to the present, and brought the manliness and generosity of his nature once more to the fore, through the visible anguish of one whom he passionately loved.

"Mary," he said, drawing her fondly towards him, "you must forgive me; you shall not suffer, and suffer in silence any more, the time is come for action. You must teach me how to act. You are the one noble thing in the world that will not turn from me in disgust when all is told. There was but one way to release you, darling, from the fetters of the love which can only bring disgrace to you, and that I have missed.

If I had died, it would have been better for us all. It would have been better for you, better for him, better for me ; it was all that was left to me, and I have missed my chance. It would be mockery to tell you, Mary, that I can live for you ; my very existence is an injury and a wrong. I am the innocent victim of this curse-shadowed house. God help me, and comfort you. You have been true and faithful to a sinking cause. You have loved and trusted, as never woman loved and trusted before ; and you will have your reward, my darling—in Heaven.”

The last words were spoken in a tone of utter despondency ; that weakness which shrouds the soul in a deadly mist, and which paralyses the mental, even more than the bodily energies, had wrapped him round, as in a cloud ; and he succumbed to its influence, like a strong

man in the toils of a net. It was the feeling that it would be better for all those whom he loved upon earth that he should die, that had possessed his soul from the first, and that had written with iron fingers upon his broad pale brow the characters from which Mary had started when she beheld them first; for they were written in what had been to her, hitherto, a strange and unknown hand; they were the sign of the hidden conviction which had taken firm hold of him, "it were better that I should die," and which had well nigh proved too strong for the instinctive struggle of young life to gainsay or resist.

Even Mary's pathetic appeal to him, "Oh, John, you must not die!" had not altered this conviction, although it had touched him and wounded him to the quick.

"I had a curious dream last night,"

he went on to say. "I dreamt that I saw my mother, and that she bade me take heart, for the curse was about to be removed from our house. 'From this house, perhaps,' I replied, 'perhaps so, mother, for I am about to leave it,' and then I thought she began to weep, and as I awoke, I heard the rustling of silk, and the faint echo of the utterance which I have so often heard before in the dead silence of the night. You may smile, Mary, if you will; but, for my part, I believe firmly in the appearance of the Baynard ghost. Poor Orion heard it the day before he died. I have heard it more than once, and each time it was the herald of ill.

"John, you are determined to break my heart, I see," answered Mary, sadly, and taking his hand in her own. "Will you not try to rouse yourself for my sake? You will be better away from here."

“For your sake, my darling, as you know, I would willingly lay down my life, I will do anything you ask me, anything you bid me; I will obey you, Mary, you have only to speak. It is the worst sign about me that I have no *will* left. I shall be pliant as wax in your hands, my dear, to mould my future to the pattern which you will trace out. I have tasted the applause of men once, and, for your sake, I would taste it again. But what career is open to *me*, whose curse it is to have had my life poisoned from the fountain head? I was once fool enough to think that our fate was in our own hands, and that dishonour could be no man's *inheritance*; but in that I have been cruelly deceived.”

“No,” said Mary, in her firm, gentle accents, “you have not been deceived, as you will live to own, John, and as I shall live to see. There is a path before

you now, in which I, for one, shall be prouder to walk at your side, than I was when you were the popular heir of King's Baynard, for it is a path which you will carve for yourself. Only let that be done quickly which must be done before long. This secret, John, which is killing you, why should it remain a secret for a single day? There can be but one course, now that you are better, now that you are comparatively well. I will not insult you by pointing out the honourable course to *you*. It is not for me to instruct a master in his own code. Only I would remind you, that it would be death to our cause to be forestalled. Let the declaration come from your own lips. We cannot afford to delay. It has been on my lips to say this for days, but I knew that you would soon awake to the necessity of such a declaration, and I was not deceived; for it was you who

were the first to say, 'the time is come for action.' Oh, John, how I love you for that!"

She was so careful and sensitive for the sun-bright honour, (as she esteemed honour) of the man she loved, that she had welcomed this sign of returning sense to the promptings of it in his breast, as the first ray of sunlight that breaks through the after-gloom of a storm. It was the rekindling of life to her, the birth of a new hope, the banishment of a settled despair; for it was the fact that he had never spoken word with regard to the future, that had laid its leaden weight upon her with a persistency which she could not shake off. Now that he had spoken to her of *that*, her course was comparatively easy. She had not the slightest doubt or hesitation in her own mind, as to the only path now open to him as a man of honour, which she knew

him to be : and true to him and to herself she did not hesitate to urge upon him the "action" for which, as he had himself been the first to remark "the time had come." She had not realized all that it must cost her, all that it must cost him, all that it must cost the "dear old man." She would not try to realize it; but in the spirit of the true courage which had animated the breasts of her warlike ancestors, felt more inclined to turn a defiant face to the breaking of the storm cloud, and with proud unflinching gesture to say calmly, let it come.

"Young John" looked upon the fair face turned towards him full of heroic meaning, and burning with the spirit of the rapturous words. "Oh, John, how I love you for that !" and he felt that the time was come for him to say words which he had long had it in his heart to say, but to which he had not dared to

give utterance before. Now he uttered them desperately, suddenly, blindly, as a horse mad with fear or excitement rushes at an obstacle which he could not face in colder blood.

“Do not say you love me, Mary—do not say that—you must learn to forget me, child! It would be an unworthy act to let you go on loving me, although I must love you until I die, as I believe no man ever loved before, and not without good cause. Do you think it has been nothing to me, Mary, to see you and hear you every day, the most beautiful, the most tender, the most angelic of God’s creatures, hovering round me, soothing me, blessing me, loving me; and to know that you were given only to be taken away like all the rest, just when your love and presence were a part of my very being? When your life was knit into my own, and I loved you as a man can love who has

only loved *once* in his life. I must hold life indeed at the very core and heart-strings if I can give you up and *live*. Yet every word you say to me of honour, tells me that I am utterly unworthy to think of you ever as my wife, and that I am acting the part of a coward in not setting you free at once, not in words, for you would not accept them—but in actions, in following the course you tell me is the only honourable one, and leaving King's Baynard, and you too, my darling, for ever. I am not trying to work upon you, Mary; God only knows what it costs me to say the words. You *must not speak to me*," he said as he saw that the quivering white lips were parting with an appeal which he knew himself unable to resist. "You have told me my duty on one point; I have tried to blind myself to it on the other, but I cannot. I can never ask you, never wish you to become

the wife of a disgraced man. Nay, you *shall* not be," he added almost fiercely. "Can you wonder now, my darling, that I should have prayed to die? It would have been easy with your breath upon my cheek and your voice in my ear, much easier than to live without you. I must think of what the world calls disgrace, Mary," he added, "and then how can I dare think of *you*?"

"Say it all, say all that you can think of, John—all that the *world* can think of, and I will answer you still. *You* have no right to cast away my love. I have given it to you, it is a sacred thing. You cannot force it back upon me without my own consent, and that consent you will never have—my own heart will never have—for I have promised to love you as long as I live, and the promise was as all such promises are, unconditional, irrevocable. No circumstance can alter

it, and death cannot overcome it. Is this the possession, John, that you are thinking of resigning with your inheritance, with the name you believe to be yours? Do you place it in the same category, when you say it is to be taken away like the rest? How little can you know me, how little can you understand me, to think that it *can* be taken away. John, have I been breaking my heart without a sign for this?"

It was her turn to break down now, and with a passionate sob, which she had lost both the power and the wish to control, she abandoned herself for the first time in her lover's presence, to the bitterness of the grief which was consuming her, and hiding her face in her hands, she wept as she had never wept before, even when they had led her away from the grave in which lay the beloved head on which had been centred the

affections and hopes of her early youth.

As "young John" looked at the piteous sight, his very soul was troubled and torn with the anguish which took possession of him, and which for the first time seemed effectually to rouse him from the lethargy and stupor which had baffled the skill of the Doctors, and brought a desolating dread to the minds of all those who loved him, for it was so opposed to the elements of his own former nature, almost volcanic in its redundancy of life, warmth, and heat. "I should like to see him *feel*," we have heard Dr. Quintain say, when he was more ostensibly hovering between life and death, and the sentiment, if not the words, had been re-echoed by all his well-wishers at King's Baynard, the most sincere of whom would have given much to have made him angry even, for it would have been a proof that the latent fire was still alive, and capable

of kindling once more into its old flame.

Mary had been so accustomed of late to the dismal veil of reticence or despair which had come between herself and "young John," even in the moments of tenderest intercourse, that she was unprepared for the sudden gust of passion which her words and her tears had called into being. As suddenly as we have heard the breeze spring to life, and the heavy rain drops splash upon the ground, when the heat and the stillness have been so intense, that creation itself had forgotten as it were to breathe, and lay stagnant in the lap of the storm.

"Mary," he said, drawing her towards him, detaining in his own, the hands which were powerless now to conceal the troubled face, flushed and beautiful like a child's, with the rich tangled hair hanging in disorder about it. "Mary, you have conquered again. I have something to live

for, something to hope for, something to die for yet. I cannot be totally unworthy and have inspired such love as yours. No, my own beautiful, gentle love, you have chosen between me and the world, and with the help of God, I will win you an honourable place, and a name which you will not blush to wear, even though it be mine. You have broken up the stony ground, Mary, and watered it with your tears. *You have saved me*, and I shall live.

“Come,” he added eagerly, rising as he spoke, and extending his hand to her; “Come, and say good-bye to King’s Baynard, for it will be many long years before I can bear to look upon it again, for I have loved it only next to you.”

The right spring had at last been touched. The sight of those piteous tears had stirred the slumbering emotions in the breast of “young John” which

had been stunned into torpor and inaction, since the terrible night which he had passed alone at the Hall, while Mary was praying for him within a stone's throw of the very spot which had seen him wrestling with the spirit of evil, and had seen but a questionable victory obtained over its promptings to guilt. Mary looked up amazed into the face of her lover, from which the fatal cloud had been lifted like a veil, and over which the hues of life were once again melting into the most welcome harmony in her loving eyes. It had been her own work, although she did not recognize it as such. The strong clear flame had been kindled by the little hand so faithful to its former pledge. Bright and upspringing against the horizon of a future day, it would not be extinguished again by the night wind of destiny, or the capricious gusts of fate.

CHAPTER X.

"Too late! I will put back the hand of time.

Oh, think it not too late."—FIELDING.

"**M**IGHT I stay with you, while Papa goes up to the Hall?"

These words were addressed by Margaret Town-Eden, as she entered the drawing-room at the Rectory, equipped in habit and hat, just as Mary was sitting down to write to the Squire, according to a promise given to "young John" the night before.

"Of course you might and welcome," she said, rising to greet the young girl, who had lately become very dear to her; "but why is the Squire going to the Hall?"

Has John already sent to Killerton?"

"No; have you not heard that the housekeeper, Mrs. Grimstone, has sent for two magistrates to make a deposition before them? Papa is to meet Mr. Allonby there at ten o'clock. What on earth is the matter? My dear, are you ill?" she added, in alarm, as Mary's face faded from pale to white, and her limbs trembled so that she could not stand. "I ought not to have told you so suddenly, but I had no idea it would have terrified you so."

"I am not terrified," Mary answered, with a strong effort at self-command; "but I wish I could let John know. He wanted to see the Squire this morning himself—and I wish that he should see him *first*. There is a terrible secret, a family secret to be revealed—and he is the one to do it. Oh! tell me what I can do?" she said, wildly and almost

passionately; you do not know what I have had to bear, or what a more than comfort you have been to me, Margaret. They seem determined upon driving that noble spirit to desperation, and just as I thought that he was saved."

"Calm yourself now," answered Margaret, tenderly kissing the pale cheek, down which the tears were running thick and fast, "and we will think what can be done. I do not ask you to reveal any secret, dearest," she added, seating herself by her side, and taking her hand in her own; "but perhaps the revelation you hint at, is not altogether the secret you imagine. There have been cruel reports abroad, Mary, ever since the election; and Mr. Baynard's sudden illness has confirmed them in people's minds. When I say cruel, I mean cruel *for him*; no one who ever knew him has ever dreamt of maligning him. His character

for honour has been too well established in West Derefordshire for that."

As the young girl said these words as proudly and as honestly as though that fond dream of her early youth had been realized indeed, Mary looked up at her with admiration of the most genuine kind; and Margaret deserved it, for it was a noble impulse which moved her heart in favour of the man she had loved, and who had preferred another before her; and a nobler one, which moved it with loving pity towards that successful rival herself, whose beautiful head was lying so low now, with the shame of some coming humiliation at which she guessed only too well."

"What does the report say? you need not mind telling me, Margaret; as you have rightly said, it cannot affect *him*, *himself*, as it affects his position in the world; do not hesitate to tell me, for I am prepared for the worst."

"It says," answered Margaret, blushing deeply, for they were hard words for her to say to the affianced wife of the man of whom she spoke, "that Sir Marmaduke Baynard has disinherited Mr. Baynard in favour of his younger son, and it says, too, that the latter is the real heir."

"It says then, if I understand you rightly," answered Mary, looking up now full into her companion's face, "that John is the illegitimate son of Sir Marmaduke, and in that I am thankful to say, *it lies.*"

There was a fire in the hazel grey eyes, hitherto unknown to them, as Mary said these defiant words. Mabel Trevylian she believed to have been the weak and erring, but faithful wife of the adventurer, for whose sake she had brought desolation and misery upon the very home in which she had now taken her place; the secret which involved his mother's shame was

the one which was lying deep with a rankling sting in the heart of her son. It was not the belief in it which was killing him, for that was refuted by the firm conviction of his own heart, but it was the knowledge that the lie had been uttered, and uttered to him, and that he was helpless as a child unborn to fling it back in the teeth of the author of it. This part of Sir Marmaduke's parable was to form no part of his statement to Mr. Town-Eden, as a magistrate and leading gentleman in the county of Derefordshire, which would cancel the election, and banish "young John" as a nameless outcast from the soil into which he had, in a false character, struck such deep root.

In answer to Mary's energetic words, Margaret replied,

"If it lies in that, Mary, it must lie in all, for how otherwise, could Mr. Baynard be deprived of his inheritance? King's

Baynard is strictly entailed, papa says, and he is likely to know."

"I cannot tell you all, yet," Mary answered, thoughtfully, "but everything will soon be known. John is going to put it into your father's hands to-day, and then he is going away from King's Baynard for ever. I shall remain with my Uncle as long as he lives, and when he requires me no longer," she said, blushing all over face, and brow, and neck, but with a light in her eyes that belied the suspicion of any other but maidenly shame, "I shall go too."

Margaret only replied by pressing her hand, while the tears were blinding her eyes. Banishment for both was to be the end of the two destinies that had opened with such brilliant prospects; banishment from the homes they had loved so well, and which they had so nobly adorned. "You will have each

other," she said. It was a simple sentence, to convey the depth of comfort which she intended it to do, and which it did.

"Yes !" Mary answered, as simply, returning the pressure of the sympathetic hand; "and in that we shall have all. Oh, Margaret ! you can understand."

CHAPTER XI.

“They say the tongues of dying men,
 Enforce attention like deep harmony ;
 When words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain,
 For they breathe truth, that breathe their words in pain.

KING RICHARD II, Act 2.

AS Mr. Town-Eden rode slowly up the avenue at King's Baynard, he was overtaken by Mr. Allonby, who had urged his stout cob to a sharp trot, in the fever of curiosity that was consuming him, to know what was “up at King's Baynard,” now. The difference between the two men was never more apparent. Mr. Town-Eden, the honourable and warm hearted gentleman, who felt that there was trouble in store for one, who had

endeared himself to all his neighbours by the qualities which English gentlemen value most—honour, sociability and *pluck*, had subdued the pace of his horse, shrinking from the revelation which he felt would blight the prospects of the reputed heir, and send him an exile from the fair inheritance, in which his heart had delighted so long. It was true what Margaret had said. Reports had been circulated far and wide to the effect that the new member for West Derefordshire was a disgraced (so the world had it,) a disgraced and disinherited man; and the Squire naturally associated in his mind the deposition which he had been sent for to hear, with some family secret, which would bring the fate of “young John” to the crowning issue of exposure and humiliation.

It was the fashion to swear in those days, and an oath escaped the lips of the

honest gentleman, as he answered his brother squire testily who congratulated himself on being in "such good time."

"——it, Sir! I wish I was late."

Riding away from the house, they encountered Mr. Nathaniel Lines, the Elminster attorney, on the gaunt steed Quill-driver, and a very disagreeable smile played round the lips of that ill-favoured gentleman, as he saluted the two magistrates with a jaunty bow.

" 'Richard's himself again,' gentlemen, I am happy to be able to report. Mr. John's fine constitution has told in his favour, and we shall have him round again in no time."

"Have you heard anything, Mr. Lines, anything particular I mean, up at the Hall?" asked Squire Allonby eagerly, and dying to make the communication which he meant that this remark should entail.

“Nothing very particular to me, Squire, nothing that I have not known for some little time back.”

“Come on, Allonby,” growled Mr. Town-Eden, who hated the attorney as an honest man instinctively hates a rogue ; “you were afraid of being late just now.”

“We’ve got to hear a deposition you see,” said the indefatigable gossip, turning in his saddle, and resting his hand on his horse’s back, “from old Mrs. Grimstone, the housekeeper, have you heard anything of that?”

The smile died away on the parchment-coloured lip, as the words fell on the attorney’s ears, and as he rode slowly on his way after the communication had been made to him, he swore with a great oath, which startled the gaunt-steed from the horse-dream in which he had been indulging, that the old hag should repent of this.

"I always knew she was dangerous," he said aloud to himself, "a silent woman always is. I wonder how much she can tell," and he rode slowly on his way with a very different expression on his face, than that with which he had greeted the two magistrates, on their way to the Hall.

"I sent Smithson on, in the trap," remarked Squire Allonby to his taciturn companion, as the two dismounted at the hall-door at King's Baynard. "He'll be wanted, you know, to write down. Perhaps you had better lead the way," he added, as Saunders appeared and ushered them into the dining-room, saying as he did so, "Will you walk upstairs now, gentlemen, or take some refreshment first?"

"We had better go up at once—up at once," said Mr. Allonby, rubbing his hands, for he was now wound thoroughly up to a full pitch of nervousness, importance, and curiosity. "If you'll be good

enough to send my clerk this way, we'll go up at once."

"How is Mr. Baynard?" asked Mr. Town - Eden, turning to the servant; "would he like to see me first? Before we go to this woman, I mean."

"Mr. John is not up yet, Sir. He never gets up till middle day now," was the reply, at which the good Squire gave a groan.

"Poor lad, poor lad!" he said to himself, "is it come to this? Well, let us go up?"

They found Mrs. Grimstone right royally lodged, in what was called the state room, in the old unused wing of the house. A silent housemaid, who was her own niece, shared it with her, and as none of the other servants in the house would put a foot over the threshold after dark, they had it entirely to themselves. The old woman, who was in bed, received the

two magistrates alone. She looked very ill, although she had been up and about (Saunders told them) the day before, and her spare bony figure made a hard outline in the centre of the vast state bed, with its oak carvings and damask draperies, in which she looked like the pictures of Queen Elizabeth, during the last ghastly hours of her life.

The room was panelled with oak, and the great thickness of the walls was shown by the vast recesses in which the three windows, which could not be said to light the room, lay buried almost from sight, letting in faint rays of the brilliant sunshine, which only half penetrated the sombre gloom. It was indeed a chamber, over the threshold of which a Fatima might have hesitated to step, and under circumstances less calculated to excite interest and curiosity,

Mr. Allonby, whose physical development was not strong, and whose nerves were none of the best, might have felt some hesitation in obeying the signal which Mrs. Grimstone made to him and his brother magistrate to approach the bedside, which she did as soon they entered the room. She then requested them to administer the usual oaths, which they proceeded at once to do, and after a silence of some seconds, she said distinctly and slowly, while with one bony hand outside the coverlet, she emphasised the words which might prove of so much importance to the future destiny of the reputed heir, whose revelation had also to be made.

“I have committed no crime, Sirs; but I have something on my mind which weighs there, and of which I must be relieved before I die. There have been secrets enough in this house, gentlemen,

and the day for clearing them up has come at last."

Here Mr. Allonby might have been observed to bend his head, and look inquisitively, with a sidelong glance at the countenance of the old woman, which, however, did not reveal so much as her words, which were clearly enunciated and which broke the stillness of the vast room, like the regular ticking of a clock—for she repeated them as a child repeats a lesson which it has learnt by heart. Indeed, it was more than likely that she had often enacted that scene in imagination, and that she knew her part pretty well by the time she was called upon to perform it.

"Secrets enough," she repeated, "to break more than one heart, but which shall not break the last and best of them all, if the truth which I have to tell now at the eleventh hour, and which, as a dying woman I *must* tell now, can prevent it."

“I dare say you might have heard, gentlemen (for it has been the world’s talk before now) that Sir Marmaduke Baynard married young, but I doubt if you ever heard who Lady Baynard was. There were few in that secret, which was secret the first—and I was *one*.

“One of the *three* who knew that Mabel Trevylian, and *Lady Baynard* were one and the same person, and that she is the mother of the young man down stairs, who has been lying, as you may say, on his death-bed, and all through the shame of having his mother’s name dishonoured; for she was as *true a wife* as ever lived, and he is as *true an heir*.

“Is he taking down what I say?” she added, as she noticed that the clerk had paused in his writing, paralysed, apparently by the importance of the revela-

tions that were falling from the old woman's lips.

“There is more to come; but I must begin at the beginning, and tell you how it was that I came in possession of the secret, which Sir Marmaduke, aye, and for that matter, my son Luke, too, would have cut my tongue out, sooner than I should have made known this day. It was believed all round here, that it was with my son Luke, that Mabel Trevylian ran away from her father's house. It was *with* him, indeed, but it was not for his sake. She went to Sir Marmaduke, she was married to him, as she has told me over and over again, before she left England; and he took her abroad with him, and was proud enough, and fond enough of her too, until some time after the first child was born, and then she faded in health, and pined after her home and

parents, and was always at Sir Marmaduke to let her go back to them with her child. But he used her shamefully, gentlemen. He would mock at her with that cruel tongue of his, before me and before Luke, until the tears would fall upon the baby's face like rain, and make it cry, and then she would wipe them away, and begin to fondle and comfort him, and take no more notice of Sir Marmaduke than if he had been miles away, for all her love now was for the child ; and it seemed to me that she got weaker and weaker in the head, and her husband hated her more and more, for she interfered with his pleasures, and he was a gay man at that time, was Sir Marmaduke. I have seen him strike her, even ; and my son Luke, more shame to him, who was the master-spirit of the two, would encourage him in his cruelty, and jibe and mock at the poor creature, too.

“ ‘ She is a proud jade,’ I could hear him

mutter between his teeth, 'but her son shall never inherit King's Baynard if I can prevent it.'

"You see, gentlemen, he had come to love her himself, when he was courting her for Sir Marmaduke; and she had flouted and jeered at him, and trampled him under foot like, and he was not one to forget that. Sometimes she would pick up her spirit for a day or so, and turn upon her husband with a taunt of her own. She would call him 'Sir Mark' when she was in one of these moods, and tell him that he had better treat her as his father had treated the hind at Mark's Bush. But it was only a flash, for her spirit was pretty well broken; and she was expecting another baby, which she said she would take back to her father, whether Sir Marmaduke would or no.

"'It shall be called Gilbert,' she said, 'remember that, Nanna,' the little one's

name for me that was, and she called me so then, and ever since for that matter; for she always clung to me, although she hated Luke, and knew that he was her enemy, too. 'You will promise to have it christened Gilbert, if I die, as I daresay I shall, for I begin to feel it here,' she would say, touching her head. 'I am not what I was, and I deserve to die, for I brought down my dear mother's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave; and my father will not send me his blessing, and I shall not rest quiet in my grave without it.'

"You see, gentlemen, she had written to her father, and sent the packet, as she thought, by safe hands; but there were spies on every side of her, and it never reached him; indeed, how could it, for it never went. She waited and waited for a sign, or a word of forgiveness, but it never came, and then she gradually sank

into a state of helplessness, and her poor wits deserted her, and they called her mad. She would sit all day with her child on her knee, talking to him, and crying over him, and in daily expectation of that other one, which came at last, as it was supposed, at the cost of his poor mother's life, who was believed to have died at a little inn in Switzerland, on her way to join her husband at Geneva, after the birth of an infant son. It was my doing, gentlemen, bringing the poor crazed creature back to England with me, her only friend. It was her one cry, to be brought back to King's Baynard, with the child that she had at her breast.

“She had forgotten the other one, who was with his father at Geneva, and in whom he had a sort of pride at that time, because he was his heir; and because, perhaps, he had not then quite forgotten the love he once had for the mother.

And I brought them back—back to England, back to King's Baynard, at my own risk, on my own responsibility. You can hardly tell me, gentlemen, that *this* was a crime. My husband knew of it; but he was always a poor creature. He would do whatever I told him, he was only a tool in my hands, and with his help I managed it. In so doing, I believe that I saved her life, and the life of the child; for it would have killed her to go back to him then. Can you say, gentlemen, that *this* was a crime?"

"Go on," said Mr. Town-Eden, "go on, and tell us how long this unhappy lady lived after you brought her home here to King's Baynard; and whether you are in possession of any *proofs* of her marriage with Sir Marmaduke. It might be of vital importance to the heir to hold back such a fact as that."

"I have no proofs beyond her own

solemn assurances," answered Mrs. Grimstone, "but I do not doubt but *that* they might be procured. In reply to the other question, Sir, *Lady Baynard is alive now*. It is that you may see her that I sent for you.

"*Lady Baynard is in there.*"

As she said the last words, she stretched a finger in the direction of a spot which seemed to be shrouded in utter gloom, and the faces of the three men, who heard the assertion, and witnessed the corresponding action, grew pale under their influence.

"I have sent for you to see Lady Baynard, gentlemen, that you may put her into some other keeping when I am dead and gone. I have done my duty by her, and so has Mary, my niece; but she would not have taken the whole responsibility on her own shoulders. I am a dying woman, but I have committed no crime. I have done my duty by the

poor lady, and by the child ; and I will do my duty to the last, in telling the truth this day, as I hope for mercy at the hands of God. There is a foul injustice on foot towards the rightful heir, as I gathered from his sweetheart the other day, but my words shall right him again, and he shall have King's Baynard yet. Gentlemen, you must see the poor lady herself. Be kind enough to go into that room," she added, waving her hand in the direction before indicated, "the door is left ajar—I am unable to show you the way."

The two magistrates looked at one another in perplexity, not unmixed with awe. Mr. Allonby fell a little back to allow Squire Town-Eden to take the precedence in piloting their way to the mysterious chamber, in which had been concealed for more than twenty years, the real mistress of the old Hall, and

the long-lost daughter of the aged Rector, who had lived all that time within a stone's throw of the child he had never ceased to mourn. "Young John's" mysterious mother, the first, the only Lady Baynard, the lovely, lost Mabel Trevilian, was *in there*, and the son of her youth, and of her affections, whose fate had been so implicated and interwoven in hers, had been breaking his heart under the same roof, within reach of the very hand that had once so fondly caressed him. She had been nothing to him since he had come to King's Baynard, but the shadow of a shadow—but the impalpable essence of an idle legend—but the skeleton embodiment of the curse on his house—she had been to him neither more or less than the but half believed in "Baynard ghost."

That still beautiful lady, with her marble-pale face, and fantastically-ar-

ranged head-gear (sole remnant of the coquetry which had made Mabel Trevelyan the unhappy wife of the profligate baronet), was the spectre which had haunted King's Baynard for so many long dreary years of waiting and watching for the time to come, when she would be taken home. The low wail of entreaty or impatience, with which on wakeful nights her voice would break the silence of the Hall, was the utterance which had fallen so often with a deadly meaning upon the ear of "young John," and which had failed on one eventful and miserable night, to awaken him from the lethargy into which he had sunk; or to rouse him from the stupor which was the prelude to the fierce struggle which we have seen take place between life and death, and which had not yet terminated in favour of either combatant.

There was nothing terrible or soul-

appalling in the spectacle which the two magistrates witnessed as they stood on the threshold of the room, historically famous as the hiding-place of more than one royal fugitive, to whom the loyal walls of King's Baynard had afforded a timely refuge, and which had been called "the King's room," while it had been a boast of the staunch Jacobite baronets of old days, that one of the youngest and fairest of the family, had stood on the threshold of the state-room, with bare white feet, and dishevelled hair, daring the Puritan colonel to allow his bloodhounds to invade the sanctity of her bed-chamber.

In this small, low-browed room, hung with tapestry, they saw, in the dim light of a pair of wax candles which stood on the table at her side, a beautiful, faded woman, who rose as they entered, and made three low curtsies, such as pro-

claimed her to have been a woman of distinction and fashion, of a somewhat antiquated date, as she said :

“ You are welcome, gentlemen ; Sir Marmaduke will be here shortly. I am Lady Baynard, as you are aware, no doubt. You will excuse me, I am a poor invalid. I have been waiting for some years to go home to King’s Baynard, but Sir Marmaduke is not willing. What do you think of this head-dress ? It is of the last mode. Sir Marmaduke likes it. But I am waiting to go home ; the baby is there, you know ; and my husband beats me sometimes, although I am Lady Baynard, and wear the family diamonds. I suppose it is the way with husbands ; ” and as the words left her lips, she gave utterance to the ghastly laugh which proclaims the mind diseased, at once, to an experienced ear. It died into a wail, on which seemed to float the words which

excited imaginations had curiously interpreted aright, "Ah! Sir Mark! Sir Mark!"—and then the unhappy lady relapsed into silence, and out of her countenance faded the light of the soul. The temporary excitement caused by the entrance of such unwonted visitors had burnt out, and she neither recognized nor resented their intrusion.

"This is a most extraordinary revelation," remarked Mr. Allonby, at last; "and a most extraordinary apparition, too. Do you believe this story, Squire? Do you believe that this poor lunatic has been for twenty years concealed in this den? What steps ought we to take? This is a terrible house!" he added, looking back into the state room with a shiver, as he encountered the black bead-like eyes of the old woman, which seemed the only moveable things belonging to her.

"We must procure proofs of the mar-

riage, if possible," was the reply of the Squire, who seemed to be lost in thought, and to be weighing some important question in his honest but obtuse mind. "*That* is the first thing to be done, for there is not much time to lose there, I take it;" he added, indicating with a gesture the Elizabethian figure lying still and passive in the state bed. "She is a dying woman, which she well knew before she sent for us."

The old woman, whose power of hearing seemed to be just then unnaturally acute, overheard the last remark; and beckoning Mr. Town-Eden to her side, said, "You are right, Squire, nothing but my being a dying woman, or his being a dying man, would have forced this revelation from my lips. *I have committed no crime*; but there would not have been wanting those who would have said I had. I have saved her life, poor dear, and her son's life,

perhaps; for if she had been got rid of, as they wished so long ago, it would have been hard enough to have proved *who* she was, and *what* she was, now. There is no doubt from what I gather from those who have been with the master, that Sir Marmaduke has made him out illegitimate, and it has broken his heart amost; for he has *her* spirit, or rather the spirit she had when she was Mabel Trevylian; for it has been crushed out of Lady Baynard long ago. Do you know what I did the other night?" She went on in an excited, eager manner, that told only too truly, that the end was not far off. "I let her see him. It was the night he came home from foreign parts; and Mr. Saunders told me he had been 'making a little free.' He'll sleep sound enough to-night, I reckon, he said; and then the wish came strong upon me, as it had often come before, to bring them together once again, for was it not

I that first put him into her arms, when she became a mother, and before her husband began to break her heart in earnest, poor thing! I got her up and dressed her, and she followed me like a lamb, for I told her she was going home. I opened the door of the library softly, thinking he was abed in the room beyond; but he was sitting there at the table, with his head on his folded arms; and I drew back for I was afraid he might wake—‘Come back,’ I said to my lady, in a whisper, but she would not have it.

“‘I must go to him,’ she said, ‘or he will curse me, he always does if I am frightened at him;’ she thought it was Sir Marmaduke, you see, Sirs, drunk as he often was—and before I could prevent her, she had gone up to him, and put her poor hand upon his arm, and broke into the old cry, ‘Ah, Sir Mark! Sir

Mark !' she used to taunt him with when he raised his hand against her, as I have seen him do with my own eyes, when she had offended or contradicted him. It was that turned me against him as I nursed at my own breast, and against Luke, too, for he hated her worse than poison. I went over to my lady's side then, and I have served her well through all these long years she has lived concealed in her husband's home—and I will serve her well to the last; but I am more than fourscore, and I have not long to live."

A violent fit of coughing here interrupted the flow of the old woman's narrative; and then glided quickly to the bedside, the faded but still graceful form of the unhappy Lady Baynard, who said, gently stroking the bed-clothes with her wavering, purposeless hand,

"Nanna, Nanna, you must not go

home without me. I want to go home to the Rectory—to my father and mother—I want them to know that I am Lady Baynard; Henry Vavasour saw me married, and he loved me once himself, you can ask him, and he will tell you; he looked white enough, God knows. Poor Harry! I used him very ill. If I had married him, he would not have beaten me. Ah, Sir Mark! Sir Mark! Oh, Nanna, take me home, take me home with you!” the poor lady cried hysterically, and clinging fondly to the failing hand, on which she had relied so long for the only human aid she knew; and the old woman, gazing earnestly at her, said, hoarsely but distinctly,

“My poor dear, I wish I could, but I will leave you in good hands; these gentlemen will take care of you, and take you home. There is one thing more I have to say,” she added, turning her eyes

towards them, "the boy at the lodge, who died the other day, poor Gilly, he was her child, and the master's own brother, the next heir after him. I brought him home with her; but after the first she never cared for him. She took a fancy that he was not her own, that he had been changed at nurse, which made it all the easier to separate them. They think at the lodge that he was Luke's child, and that I was his grandmother. When the master was so ill, it shook me to think that *he* was the next heir, and it was almost a relief to me when he died. Then it was that I first thought of sending for you. My niece got a fright into her head that it was a hanging matter, as she called it, but whether it be or not, I shall not live to be hung, and I have done my duty, Sirs, as well as I knew it; and if I have committed a crime, it has been unawares. My

lady is as quiet and gentle as a lamb ; although she has scared many, who thought she was the Baynard Ghost. I managed that, by dressing my Lady in green, so that, if by any chance she did walk the old house at night, she cleared her own way, poor dear ! There is not a servant in the place as would come within a stone's throw of her, if they could help it ; and as for Mr. John, he believed in the story of the ghost himself, for I have heard him say as much in a half joking sort of way, so that there was no fear of any interference from him. He too kept to his own rooms, and I would not show any one over the house, as he got to know, and so, after a time, I was quite easy in my mind, and let things take their course.

“ It gave me a turn when I heard that he had got a sweetheart, and was going to be married ; for ladies are more keen about

such things and I knew there would be a doing up of the old place from garret to cellar, and the west wing and the state rooms into the bargain. But I have not trusted to Providence so long for nothing, thinks I, and I'll bide my time a little longer; for I had heard Sir Marmaduke could not live, and I had liefer say what I had to say when he was under the sod; for it is an ill thing to anger Sir Marmaduke, and he is the only man that I ever feared. He and my son Luke would curse me if they knew what I have done; but I need not fear them, for there is a letter in my possession, which would hang Sir Marmaduke, giving me the prescription for a draught for my Lady, which would soon *ease her of all pain*. I wrote word that the medicines had had the desired effect, and that I would never part with either the letter or the prescription.

“ Mr. Nathaniel Lines has been hankering after that letter for some time, but it was not likely that I should part with it, for it has brought me a good income, and helped to keep my Lady and the boy in comfort, too.

“ I wish Sir Marmaduke to be wrote to, when I am gone, and told that the only Lady Baynard is still alive, for I hear that he has married a bad foreign woman, and that she has been working to get Mr. John cut off; she might have thought to gain her own end, for his father never liked him after he got old enough to see the evil of his ways, and Luke was dead against him from the time he was born. There is a plot, you see, gentlemen, between those three, my son Luke, Nat Lines, and the foreign woman; they would cut Mr. John out if they could, and get King's Baynard and the minor into their own keeping. I see

it all ; but I am for the rightful heir."

"We must see the letter and the prescription you speak of, Mrs. Grimstone," said Mr. Town-Eden. "I think with that in our possession, we shall be able to counterplot even against the three formidable conspirators you have named."

"You shall see it, Squire, but not to-day. I am weak and faint, and I have not long to live ; but I must see you again, gentlemen, before I die. Go now and have something to eat, may be I shall send for you again. Susan show the gentlemen down."

The old woman's words were authoritative, and the magistrates mechanically obeyed them, following Susan who was a woman of about forty, square, broad, and placid looking, and who made a low reverence to the magistrates as they passed by her, through the open door.

"I had nought to do with it, save tend-

ing them, Sirs," she said, "and it was me as forced Aunt to send for you."

"You did wisely," answered Mr. Town-Eden encouragingly, as he followed out of the room his brother magistrate whose curiosity had for once yielded the palm to the all mastering passion of fear, and who could only ejaculate "Lord ! Lord ! I wish I was well out of this terrible house," as he shuffled and stumbled down the old oak stairs.

CHAPTER XII.

“Man is his own star, and that soul that can
Be honest is the only perfect man.”

FLETCHER.

AS the two magistrates sat in the dining-room, too much lost in amazement at the scene they had just witnessed, and the declaration they had just heard, to have thawed into loquacity on the subject, they were joined by Saunders the groom, who had become, since the serious illness of his master, body-servant, nurse, and confidential messenger all in one.

“The master wishes to see you, Squire,” he said, addressing himself to

Mr. Town-Eden, and respectfully pulling his fore-lock as he did so. "I could not keep it from him that you was come, Sir," he added apologetically, "and then he worried his-self till he saw you."

Mr. Town-Eden, after a few words to his brother magistrate (who had had his fill of mystery, and who was white from the effects of the interview with the mysterious lady in green, in the dim oak chamber, sacred to the legends of the past) made his way to the library, with honest tears in his eyes, and with something in his throat that thickened and impeded his utterance, as he hastened to greet "young John" with congratulations on his recovered health. He found him standing on the hearth before the fire, which burned night and day in the open grate, for notwithstanding the warm rays of the June sun, the life-blood, since his illness, seemed to have frozen in his veins.

The good Squire was nervous, or to speak more correctly, perturbed, (nerves, according to our interpretation of them, not having been calculated for in the iron physique with which nature endowed the country gentleman of the olden time) and his strong, ringing voice, had an unnatural quaver in it, as he said—

“Well ! well ! well ! this will never do, dear boy, moping over a fire on a fine summer’s day ; we must have you out again in a trice. We’ve been as dull as ditch-water ever since the election ; we must have you on your legs for us in Parliament, soon, to say nothing of the wedding—Gad, but you must pick up your looks before that comes off. We must have you amongst us again, and cheer you up a bit, if the pretty young lady at the Rectory, does not make a better hand of it than this.”

“Do not be too hasty, Squire,” replied

the young man, smiling "the mournful smile that breaks the heart," as he did so. "You will have another election to keep you alive before long. You do not know what a black sheep you are inviting into your fold. I have sent to you to-day on business; painful business I know you will call it, for you have a kind heart; but it is business which cannot be delayed."

"Are you strong enough? Had you not better wait?" These words were said with anxious solicitude expressed in every feature of the worthy Squire's face. He was shocked to see the change which his recent severe illness had worked in "young John;" although those who had been with him of late, would have observed a marked improvement in him, since his conversation with Mary Trevylian on the preceding evening. There was life in his eyes, life in the nervous tension of his

hands, life in every turn of the glorious head, from which neither illness or sorrow could rob the inimitable grace. But the Squire only noted the palor of his complexion, and the emaciation of his strongly-knit frame, and the doubt came into his mind whether he would withstand the shock of the revelation, which he had, on his part, to make.

“He is so like *her*,” he thought, “there can be little doubt whose son he is, for that matter, and there is a look of Sir Marmaduke too, about the brows. If we can obtain proofs of the marriage, all will yet be well; but my mind misgives me on that head, for Sir Marmaduke was a leary dog.”

“Squire,” broke in “young John,” before this train of ideas had quite marshalled themselves into proper order. “I have sent for you to-day, to tell you, not exactly who and what *I am*, but who

and what *I am not*. I have unwittingly imposed upon you all, down here at King's Baynard. I am not bound to make my mother's name a byeword, all that I am bound to tell you is that I am *not* the heir of King's Baynard. It is nothing to me, nor I to it. I have been used as a tool, and cast off when done with by the bitterest enemy I, or my mother ever had. I cannot explain to you *why* the cruelty of deceiving me, and causing me to deceive others, has been practised upon me. I have been like Warwick the king-maker, 'the shameless herald of a lie.' Squire," he added with a burst of emotion, and seizing the honest gentleman by the hand, whose tears were now falling fast down his ruddy cheeks (little used, weather-beaten as they looked, to such rain as that) shall I tell you, who my mother was?"

Here was a home question, the magis-

trate had determined upon what appeared to him the most honourable course he could pursue; namely, to let the young man have his say, before he volunteered any observation on his own part, touching the events of the two previous hours. He believed in his own mind, that "young John" had been told by Sir Marmaduke that he was not entitled either to the name or inheritance which had hitherto been looked upon as his. He pitied the young man, for whom, even during his temporary unpopularity at Killerton, he had always entertained the warmest regard from the depths of his heart; and he was determined that heir or no heir, he would have it to say in the market place at Elminster, and at other places of public resort where the matter would soon be canvassed in all its bearings, that "young John" had, of his own freewill, made the

confession that had robbed him of his inheritancé, and of all that he most prized in connection with it, and with his self-earned position amongst them during his residence at his beautiful home."

Surprised out of his caution, however, and unused in his honest policy to prevarication or beating about the bush, when a straight-forward question was asked in reply to the one, "Shall I tell you who my mother was?" he stammered out rather guiltily. "I think I know, dear boy, I think I know."

"You know, Sir," answered "young John" quickly, the blood mounting into his face, and even climbing the heights of his broad forehead. "*You know, Sir!* then I am too late after all. There is some fate against me, and I must drink the cup to the dregs. I am not the first then to inform you and the electors of

Derefordshire that I am a disgraced and ruined man; for, according to your guarded expression, I must infer that *they think they know*. You might have spared me that, Squire. For the sake of old times, you might have said it straight out, and have done with it, you might indeed. It is no use fencing with a disarmed man; so this is the end of it—*found out*,” and throwing himself into a chair, he hid his face in his hands, and unconsciously groaned aloud.

“Hang it! if I can stand this,” muttered the magistrate to himself. “I never saw a man so broke in my life. Come,” he added, advancing and laying his great brown hand as gently and as tenderly as a woman might have done, upon the shoulder of the young man, “it might not be as bad as you think, and the proofs might be forthcoming after all.”

“What proofs?”

“The proofs of your mother’s marriage, who might, for all we know to the contrary, be living still.”

It was a bold move on the part of the magistrate, little accustomed to “breaking the truth,” as that most cruel operation is conventionally called; and if he could have broken a thunder-bolt over “young John’s” head, the effect could hardly have been more electrifying, or more sudden than that caused by his guarded words. The young man sprang to his feet, with a sudden violence of motion to which his palpable weakness afforded no ostensible clue, and made for a moment as though he would have laid his hands in anger upon the old man, while a fierce searching gaze was bent upon him from the deep-set eyes, which were so tender in their softer mood, as he burst out with these words.

“You are insulting me, Squire—insulting me in my own house, I was going to say, but that you cannot do. You are doing worse, though, you are wounding to the quick a man who is down, who would never willingly have done you the smallest wrong. As man to man, Squire, I appeal to you, is it generous to make my miserable fate a handle for your jeers and gibes? *Living still!*” he added, with a great sob, which shook him like a reed, without affording the relief of tears. “No, thank God! she is beyond the reach of the cruel tongues that defame her. No, Squire, you dare not play with my feelings thus—you *dare* not tell me that again.”

“It is not between men to talk about what they dare,” answered Mr. Town-Eden, unflinchingly “my white hairs would be a safeguard with you. I am as tender for your honour, as you can

be for your own, although you do not think so now. I came here to listen, not to forestal you; but you asked me a question, and in my answer I implied the truth. I am ready to listen to what you have to say; only be calm, dear boy, be calm."

"I sent for you, to ask you what steps I ought to take with regard to cancelling the election, which I won in a false name, under false auspices," "young John" replied, while every particle of colour faded from his cheeks and lips. "If you Tories had not chosen me to represent you, Squire, I might have left King's Baynard to-morrow, without making public the miserable story, which I am now bound in honour to make the common talk, and which, it seems, that you have all of you more than suspected long ago. It is not what you think, though," he added, dropping his voice, and again

taking the Squire's hand with almost filial tenderness within his own, "*my mother was a true wife.*"

"I do not doubt it for an instant. If we can only establish the *proof* of that, you are saved."

"I am saved so far," answered the young man, proudly. "I will shoot any man who dares to dispute it."

"You speak in riddles. If your mother was what you say, it is not in Sir Marmaduke's power to disinherit you. You mean only to infer, that she never failed in her duty after she became Lady Baynard, but that she was a mother before she was a wife."

"I mean no such thing, Squire, you are upon the wrong tack. I am not bound to say who my mother married, but it was not Sir Marmaduke Baynard; *I am no son of his.*"

"The plot thickens," groaned the

thoroughly puzzled magistrate, "and hang me if I can see any sort of clue to it yet."

To his great relief an interruption occurred, in the shape of Saunders, who entered, carrying in his hand a note, which he apologised for upon the plea that it came from the Rectory, and that it was marked "immediate."

"Don't mind me," said the good Squire, who could not help rallying, even in his gravest moods, "'when a lady's in the case, all other things give place;' read your letter—I can wait."

"It does not take long to read; you can see it, Squire, and act as you think best. There is one true heart that knows all, and has not deserted me," he added, proudly, as Mr. Town-Eden fumbled for his spectacles in his waistcoat pocket, and ended by protesting he could not find them. It is my belief that there was

that in his eyes, which would have hindered him from reading the few lines which Mary had sent to her lover even had they been forthcoming.

"Tell me the purport of them, dear boy, tell me the purport, and I will give you the best advice I am able."

"This is what she says, 'Mrs. Vavasour is here, and sends her carriage for you and the Squire to come to the Rectory at once; she has information of the greatest importance to communicate to you both. Please do not delay.'"

"As easily said as done," excitedly said Mr. Town-Eden, who was glad of the loophole which presented itself for a break into the *tête-à-tête* which was becoming more painful to him every moment; "we will go at once, only I must speak to Allonby first."

"What is Mr. Allonby doing here?" enquired "young John" hastily, and

turning sharply round upon the Squire, who had thus committed himself to the responsibility of the presence of his brother magistrate under the roof which still nominally belonged to the reputed heir, "I only sent for *one* magistrate, I think you might have spared me this intrusion, on the part of one for whom I did *not* send, Mr. Town-Eden."

"Everything shall be explained shortly," answered the Squire, "but now we must not keep Mrs. Vavasour's carriage waiting. I will ring for your man," he added, with his hand upon the bell, "and tell him to let Squire Allonby know where we are gone."

"I do not see the necessity," was the somewhat haughty reply, and, as they crossed the hall, out of which opened the door into the dining-room where Mr. Allonby had been left in the company of his clerk, they were spared all further

trouble in the matter by that worthy himself, who, shuffling along as fast as gout and increasing infirmities would allow him, called out,

“Halloa ! Squire, where are you off to ? I’m not going to be left alone in this house, I can tell you ; you’re not going to give me the slip. Halloa ! stop ! stop !”

The last words were addressed to “young John,” upon whose arm, indeed, he laid a detaining hand, as, with native courtesy, he stood back to allow Mr. Town-Eden to enter the carriage first. Angered, however, at his presence at King’s Baynard at all, the young man freed himself from his grasp.

“I am too much honoured, Sir, by your presence here, pray make yourself at home until Mr. Town-Eden returns. I am not aware that you have anything more terrible to dread than a visit from the Baynard ghost.”

“Gad, and I’ve had enough of that,” replied the old man, with a rueful expression of countenance. “Catch me coming to take any old hag’s deposition again. It’s a hanging matter, mark my words, Squire, a hanging matter.”

“Is the man mad?” asked “young John” of the friendly magistrate beside him.

“No, he is not mad, only weak in the upper story; and he has been rather shaken, to-day, for he has seen the Baynard ghost.”

These words were spoken as the carriage stopped at the Rectory door; but even if it had not been so, “young John” would have been too much preoccupied to have paid attention to their mysterious import. He was thinking of all that had happened since he stood upon that threshold last.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me.”

HAMLET, Act 5.

TO explain the cause of the interruption which the bewildered magistrate thought so opportune, it will be necessary that we should once again visit Vavasour Park, where the young widow kept her melancholy state, entirely engrossed in the adoring contemplation of the child, who was now naturally become the sole object of her life. He was a delicate little creature to look at, the tiny heir to the vast Vavasour possessions, and required all the tender care so freely lavished upon him,

to bring him safely through the two months which he had stolen upon the march of life. After that period had elapsed, however, the little limbs began to develope into the natural roundness of infancy, and the tender cheeks to bloom like twin rose-buds under the pressure of his mother's lips.

No one could know what he was to her, that tiny fragment of a creature who lay passively on her lap, looking into her face with the enquiring, confiding gaze which knits the dependant, but separate life into the heart-fibres of her who bore it—the great gift of Heaven to woman, the joy to which all other earthly joy is but as dross—which swallows up the remembrance of the anguish, and which leaves her soul in a faint rapture of happiness on the threshold of the Eden of love.

It was the direct gift of Heaven to the beautiful young widow, whose hus-

band's death, would, under any other circumstances, have told upon her with bitter effect. Her's was a character, that would either have hardened or deteriorated, without some absorbing centre, upon which to direct all the glancing rays of her nature and her genius; without such a centre, they would have become meteor-like and eccentric in their course—sparkling here and there, to illumine without warming, to dazzle without lighting, to attract without winning, in what would have been to her a desolate and alien world.

Now, it was far otherwise, and bending over the little face, in which she fondly tried to trace the outline of the well-loved features which she was never to look upon again, soft, womanly tears fell silently on it, but the bitterness of her sorrow was past. For the three months following on the election, which had been so rife with interest and incident in the lives of

the two with whom we are the most concerned, Ninon had kept her room. She had had no heart to make the effort of beginning her life at Vavasour, shorn of the glory of the love which had made Vavasour a Paradise to her. It was with a sharp sensation of the pain that *awakes* therefore, that she listened to the good Doctor's words.

"When are you thinking of coming down? The change is necessary both for you and *for the child*."

The Doctor was a wise man in his generation. He intended that Mrs. Vavasour should make the necessary effort that day, and he knew that these words contained the talisman, that would make her the obedient slave of his will.

"Do you think so, Doctor?" she answered, with an anxious gaze into the face of the babe, who, as usual, lay upon her knees. "He certainly does look a little

pale. I will give orders to have a room prepared."

"There is a fire in the Oak Chamber," said the Doctor, promptly; "I took the liberty of ordering it there, because of the South aspect."

The mother's voice faltered, and her dark eyes filled with tears, as she murmured, "The Oak Chamber. Oh! Doctor, I hardly think I can go there. But still if it is right, I will have the courage for his sake," she added, clasping the baby to her bosom. "Yes, it is well thought of, I will go there."

The name of the room had indeed called up associations that sent a pang through Ninon's soul at first; but with the pain of those very associations, flashed back into her mind the promise which she had once made to her husband, that if, in case of his death, "it should be given to her to remember anything," she would re-

member the injunction he had there laid upon her to examine the old bureau, in which he had kept faithfully the portrait of the faithless love of his youth.

“He did not love her as he loved me,” she said, when left alone in the chamber, which sucked the rays of the sun into every creak and cranny of the deeply carved oak wainscotting, making it at the same time sunnily warm, and yet soothingly shady, while the perfume of the past wrapt the senses in a dreamy delight, and the portraits of brave men, and beautiful women, looked smilingly down on the tiny representative of their noble house.

Ninon felt the soothing influence of the scene, and of its surrounding. “He did not love her as he loved me;” and then while one passionate sob escaped her, she cried aloud, “Oh ! if he had but seen his child—our child—our darling ! The morsel of a creature that is dearer to me than the

whole of God's earth. Oh ! Henri, Henri ! my husband ! where are you now ?”

It was a natural burst of sorrow, and it relieved her surcharged heart. In this very room, where she had been brought a beautiful bride, the wife of the man she loved, and the mistress of one of the proudest houses in England, she sat a new-made widow, with her fatherless child upon her knee. No wonder that the bosom of the true wife heaved wildly under the sable robe, or that her desolation stared her full in the face.

But as she said the words, the baby smiled in her face, and with that smile came the blessed conviction, that there was balm in Gilead even for her. “Tu es mon Dieu-donné,” she said, with the tears still in her eyes ; but with a feeling of deep inward peace in her soul, which wrapped her round as with a mantle, as she proceeded faithfully to perform her task.

With a firm, unhesitating hand, she unlocked the bureau, over the contents of which, she and her husband had once bent lovingly side by side. Now she was to seek among the relics of the past for her dead rival's history—*alone*. Courageously she began the search. Once again, with trembling hands, she unfastened the case which contained Poor Mabel's portrait, and long and earnestly she gazed on the sweet sad face there portrayed.

"Beautiful!" she murmured, "Beautiful as an angel, poor Mabel! what a fate was yours!"

She had long, as I have before said, discovered the secret of Mabel's parentage, and knew, with a woman's quick intuition, the reason why Mr. Vavasour had shunned all mention of the name of King's Baynard. She had, however, been at a loss to discover why a nature, so generous in its elements and bearings, should have

cherished a concealed dislike to the popular young heir, who could have been in no way connected with the unhappy fate of the beautiful girl, who had wrought such havoc in the hearts that loved her best. Laying down the faded morocco case, as tenderly as though it contained a memory sacred to herself, Ninon continued her search in the bureau, and upon opening a yellow time-stained packet, tied with a knot of tarnished silver ribbon, there fell out into her hands, a single tress of the most beautiful hair she had ever seen, which she handled reverently, as she replaced it in the paper, for she said "it is the hair of the dead."

At this moment the child stirred, and made a little wail in its sleep, and in a moment his mother was at his side, enshrining him, as it were, in an atmosphere of affection and love, and dispelling his infant fears by the magic of her wonderful

touch. The tiny clasp of the impotent, dimpled hand, crushed out of the mother's heart any feeling but that of the most profound pity for the rival of whom she had once almost fiercely asked, "Is she living, Henri?" and when she softly disengaged it, to continue her search, there was the tenderness of forgiveness in her soul, even toward the woman who had once so deeply wronged the husband she would never cease to mourn.

The object of the search was close at hand, and she recognised it as such, the moment she saw the words in Mr. Vavasour's writing:—

"An account of the marriage of Mabel Trevelyian with Sir Marmaduke Baynard, of King's Baynard, in this county; of which, with the exception of Luke Grimstone, his valet, I, Henry Vavasour, was the only witness."

CHAPTER XIV.

“And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenge.”

TWELFTH NIGHT, Act 5.

NINON'S face grew pale under the violence of the emotions which the sight of this document called up in her breast. With the lightning flash of woman's quick perception, she now connected the fate of the young heir with that of his beautiful mother, Mabel, Lady Baynard, who was believed to have allied herself with poverty, or as others had it, with disgrace, and who had sobbed out her miserable life long ago, under the ban of a father's curse.

Again, the importance to "young John" and to his intended bride of the paper, which she held between her slender fingers, shot into her mind; and the generous nature of the woman reigned paramount for a while, as she remembered the slur that had more than once in her own hearing been cast upon his birth.

"This will prove all," she said low to herself, and pressing, in the rapture of her affection, the well-known characters to her lips. "It is so like him to deal justice and happiness, even from his dead hand. My love! my Henri, it is like your living self."

The little document, the writing on which only covered a few pages, was indeed the hinge on which turned the happiness of two young and eager hearts. The contents of it went to explain the curious fact of the presence of Henry Vavasour at the wild wedding, which made

Mabel Trevelyian the bride of the wicked Baronet, Sir Marmaduke Baynard, and of the solemn promise she had extracted from her rejected lover, that he would seal in silence all knowledge of the fact, the suppression of which, in after years, had well nigh cost her son the price of an inheritance and an honoured name.

It had happened thus : Mabel Trevelyian, like many another ardent coquette before her, had concealed her true feelings under a thick veil of reticence, which she did not lift even to her mother, or to her nearest and dearest friends. Sir Marmaduke Baynard, the profligate *debonaire* Baronet, who came down every now and then to hold wild revel at the old Hall, who, with his libertine associates, became the terror and the scandal of the honest part of the neighbourhood, had engrossed first the imagination, and as a natural consequence, at last the affections of the beautiful

country girl, whose head filled with the romantic folly of the literature freely perused by the girls of that day, delighted in the romance of concealment, and cherished her clandestine attachment so secretly that it was suspected by none.

Sir Marmaduke, on his side, was deeply impressed with the charms of the rural coquette, and entered fully into the spirit of the romantic concealment of their mutual interchange of vows, from motives less innocent than her own. He had no wish to settle down as a Benedict at King's Baynard for life; but he entertained a strong desire to lure the pretty dove from the parent nest, and to make her the partner of his brilliant, but profligate career, in the lax atmosphere of the foreign capitals which he loved. Just, however, as their secret love-making had become liable to discovery by the constancy of their stolen interviews and of the

contraband, but frequent communication carried on between the Hall and the Rectory, occurred the gambling transaction which banished him in disgrace from King's Baynard. Like a true woman, Mabel believed that the man whom she really devotedly loved, was injured and maligned; and the circumstance which had crowned him with dishonour, made her adhere more fondly to her previously formed determination to consent to his plan of an elopement.

After Sir Marmaduke's prudent flight from the county, which had become too hot to hold him, the intercourse between him and the wayward, misguided girl was of necessity carried on by means of a third party. That the medium chosen was the black-eyed painter, the foster-brother and confidential body-servant, Luke Grimstone, the reader will not require to be told. It had been too no-

torious a fact in King's Baynard, even before his later appearance at the Hall, that he and the haughty little country beauty, whose scornful looks and disdainful glances had driven many an honest admirer to despair, were on more familiar terms than was seemly or correct. The servants at both houses knew well that they met in private, and that a constant interchange of notes took place between them, and rumours of this sort, the Signor Ludovico, as he was called by Sir Marmaduke's intimates in those days, did his best to propagate and confirm.

He, indeed, loved Mabel Trevylian with a far deeper fervour of passion than did the master who thus employed him to pay his court to her by proxy; and, intoxicated by the influence of the growing belief that Mabel was actually transferring her affections to himself, he dared one day to address words to her on his

own account, and in the delirious hope of furthering his own cause, which brought the proud blood into her face with a rush of sudden and transcendant scorn, that converted him into an enemy for life. "Your master shall be informed of this," she said proudly, while her eyes flashed fire, and her little foot stamped angrily on the ground, as though to typify how she trampled his love and his presumption under foot, and the words and the action planted a seed of bitterness in his equally proud heart, which bore eventually the deadly fruit we have seen.

It did not manifest itself, however, at first, such revenge as his is of slow growth; he turned away with a jest upon his lips, saying, "You mistake me, Madam, I was only pleading my master's cause." And he continued to plead so effectually, that before they parted that evening, Mabel consented to fly from her peace-

ful home, and from the loving protection of her adoring parents into the arms of the libertine Baronet, whose very name was a byeword for reproach.

There was at this very moment, a young man, the son of a neighbouring clergyman, staking his future happiness upon the die of winning—or rather of retaining, for he believed himself to be her accepted suitor—Mabel Trevylian's love. She had exercised the subtle art of coquetry so successfully in his case, as to make her very reluctance and coyness in listening to his passionate professions, seem but the promptings of a maidenly modesty. She had taught him to believe in her as the very epitome of womanly perfection and truth; she had even bestowed upon him, or rather allowed him to purloin, the precious tokens, on which his young widow more than a quarter of a century afterwards, laid such reverent hands; she

deceived him with the practised cruelty of an inborn coquette ; she drew him on to his fate, and played upon his affections, with her tender, womanly touch, until she had snapt the master-string.

He was not then the recognised heir of the Vavasour property. His uncle had two living sons, and although their health was not strong, few speculations were rife upon the probability of young Henry, the clergyman's only son, eventually becoming the heir. His shining talents had already won him renown at college, and his handsome person and refined and chivalric nature, would have made him a formidable rival in the eyes of a woman less wilfully blind than Mabel, to the shortcomings of the man she preferred.

"He is too grave and too good for me," she would say laughingly, in reply to her mother's praises of one whose worth she was willing to acknowledge,

but who could not win the affection of her wayward heart. "I have enough preaching at home." But still she encouraged him to worship at her shrine, and Henry Vavasour, who was the soul of truth, believed in her, and loved her with the strong simple faith which it is absolute sacrilege to betray. He had entreated her over and over again to give him a serious answer to the often repeated question, "Mabel, can you love me? Will you say that you will one day be my wife?" but she had always put him off with a mocking or a merry jest, and, firm in his belief in her, he was content to wait.

At the time when the interviews between Mabel and the Signor Ludovico, had become the talk of the surrounding neighbourhood, young Henry Vavasour had been mourning the loss of his mother, to whom he was passionately

attached, and little communication had passed between the two Rectories; so that the change in Mabel's manner, and the wild, flighty spirits which she assumed in public, to conceal the real terror which was beginning to flutter in her foolish breast, when the irrevocable promise had been given, escaped the notice on his part, which, under any other circumstances, they would have certainly attracted. Business called him to London, and the journey was to be performed by coach. As the coach was changing horses at a well-known posting house, within two stages of town, the attention of the passengers was attracted to a mud-bespattered post-chaise and four, by the exclamation of the coachman, "There's a runaway couple, I'll lay a wager. They have not lost much time, horses have been waiting for them all down the road."

Naturally every eye was turned upon the post-chaise, in the hope that chance might reveal a glimpse of the occupants to the gaze of the curious. Fate was not so propitious. The blinds were down; to make up for the disappointment, the dark, foreign-looking servant, in the rumble behind, became the object of general attention. With his arms crossed, however, and his defiant gaze directed in return upon the coach passengers, he seemed rather to court their scrutiny; and as the leaders were being led out, whose fine coats and wiry lean heads bore witness to the blood and courage which might have done honour to a much more pretentious equipage, he descended from his elevated position, and opening the chaise door half way, demanded of its occupant if he should bring any refreshment out, or if it would please her to alight and partake of it.

The profile of a pale, scared face was thus revealed for a single second; but that second brought death to the heart and the hopes of Henry Vavasour, for they were the features of Mabel Trevylian that were thus disclosed to his momentary gaze.

“Nothing, nothing—only let us get on,” was the reply made to the servant’s question; “for pity’s sake let us get on!” and as the man swung himself up again into the seat behind, the horses dashed forward at a pace, with which it was not likely that the heavily-loaded mail-coach, well horsed as it was, could compete.

“Have you a fast saddle-horse in the stable?” demanded Henry Vavasour of the landlord, who was standing at the door, engaged in a conversation with the coachman, as he drank his potent draught.

“The fastest in Berkshire, if the gentleman can ride,” answered the ostler, tipping the wink to his master. “Crazy Jane ’ll do his business for him in no time.”

Crazy Jane was a fleet mare, it is true, but not so staying as the flying posters who were hurling Mabel Trevylian to her fate, the Nemesis of her destiny sitting behind her, with a sardonic expression on his dark, handsome face. Crazy Jane and her rider arrived at the posting-house at Bedford, just an hour after the post-chaise and its occupant had dashed up to the door; for there had been two stages to traverse, and the mare, fleet as she was for a short distance, had “shut up” within five miles of her destination, and with drooping tail and heaving flanks, made but a sorry appearance, as her rider threw her reins on her neck, and dismounted in the Inn yard.

The post-chaise was still there, and the ostlers and helpers were busily employed in harnessing a fresh relay of four, to carry it on to town.

“Where is the lady who came in that chaise?” asked Mr. Henry Vavasour with white lips and quickly beating heart, of the landlady, who looked at him with an arch twinkle of fun in her eye.

“She’s not far off, Sir; just over the way, between the peacocks as you see from the window. Pretty dear, she’s a wife by this time, if a parson and a gold ring can make her one. She’s a handsome young lady; but she looks mortal pale, as the runaways always do.”

She was talking to herself by this time; for Henry Vavasour had quickly turned upon his heel, and had crossed the road, and entered the plain old church between the peacocks; the monuments to the vanity of the two proud sisters of a by-

gone day. There he saw Mabel Trevylian, and Sir Marmaduke Baynard, stand side by side, man and wife, and heard the blessing pronounced on their unhallowed marriage tie. He had seen enough; but as though some powerful spell were upon him, he stood rooted to the ground in a conspicuous position, as the bride and bridegroom passed down the church, *her* eyes bent upon the ground.

“By your leave, Sir,” said Sir Marmaduke haughtily, to the young man who was not personally known to him, and the harsh tone of his voice caused Mabel suddenly to look up. A slight scream escaped her lips; and she actually cowered beneath the gaze of mingled anger and scorn, flashing in the honest eyes that had never before bent upon her with any other expression than that of adoring love.

“I know this gentleman,” she said in

a whisper to Sir Marmaduke, who impatiently bent his curled and perfumed locks (for he had been a dandy, or a buck, as it was then called in his youth) to listen. "I must speak to him, his silence *must* be secured."

"You need be under no alarm on that score, Lady Baynard," said the young man, to whose preternaturally awakened sense, the silvery whisper was as distinct as a trumpet blast. "You and your husband may rest assured that the honoured name which you have forfeited, and the disgraced name which you bear, shall never again pass my lips under any circumstance, or in any shape. The silence of a proud man who has been betrayed, is easily secured; but to satisfy your scruples, Lady Baynard, I swear it, in the name of God. May I never look upon your face again."

"Oh Henry ! forgive ! forgive !" sobbed

the newly made bride, clinging in her grief more closely to her husband's arm ; but he to whom she made the appeal was gone. He did not hear the wounded cry, or the sharp sobs that succeeded it. She had seen the last of the man whose honest affection she had betrayed ; but as though even in this life such seed cannot be lost, it was the few closely written characters of his faithful hand that saved her name from dishonour, and her son from disinheritance and disgrace.

The document which Ninon had so opportunely discovered, gave the necessary clues by which the marriage could be proved beyond a doubt, and refuted the artfully woven slander, with respect to the marriage of Mabel Trevelyian with Luke Grimstone, the agent of Sir Marmaduke in the affair. Three heads had, as the old housekeeper with her natural shrewdness discovered, been at work

in the concoction of a plot, well calculated to overthrow in "young John's" mind every corner-stone for the rebuilding of an honoured house; and Sir Marmaduke, a willing tool in their hands, was only too ready to sacrifice the eldest son, for the darling, the Benjamin of his old age. He had, however, insisted upon the one condition which the young man's own eager and honourable impatience had rendered abortive.

He would not have deprived him of his inheritance in favour of the little Marmaduke, or made public the shameful history which he had recounted to him on his dying bed, if he could have extracted from him the promise, that by forswearing marriage he would ensure the subsequent inheritance of the favoured son. Beyond this he would not have gone; and this had been the tenor of the will upon which he had so strongly recommended "young

John" to rely, but the conspirators were content with this; for they well knew the honourable nature of the man with whom they had to deal; and that upon the reading of such a will, the vast estates of the Baynards, and the ever increasing wealth of centuries would be virtually in their own hands. It was a desperate venture, but they believed that they were safe.

It had been their first intention to proclaim "young John" simply illegitimate; but the wily brains of the acute attorney from Elminster had suggested the double security of making his mother not only Sir Marmaduke's mistress, but the actual wife of another man; thus complicating the mystery, and rendering any searching of marriage registers, or any latent hope of proving his mother's marriage in the mind of her son, not only useless, but confirmatory of what it would

break his heart to know, that he was the son of the greatest enemy he had ever known, and that the name of his mother had been dishonoured, both in marriage and in the shamelessness of her after career.

It was indeed, as he once expressed it, a toil in which he had been caught on every side, and his life, as it proved, had nearly been sacrificed to the machinations, which for subtlety might have emanated from the arch-fiend himself.

Now, however, the heavy clouds of his destiny, which have threatened to burst over his head, and over that of one dearer to him than his own life, are rolling away and disclosing the pure hues of an horizon which gives the promise of a glorious day.

My story is drawing to a close; but before parting with those who have trod the little stage with us so long, I must

devote a chapter to a characteristic sketch of each. Life is before most of them as the curtain falls; and as the events described took place many years ago, we can imagine that now the second, and even the third scenes have been enacted, and that the actors have made the final exit, and heard for the last time the welcome ring of the plaudits, or the fearful sybillation of the hisses, which represent the majesty of "opinion" in the mouths of the critical audience, before whom we must all pass, with the words of the Roman gladiator on our lips.

CHAPTER XV.

“Every hour has its end.”—SCOTT.

IT was the evening before the wedding, which was to take place on the anniversary of the day upon which “young John” had first come to reside at the home of his ancestors—a fair, bright, unclouded September sun was sinking to sleep behind the hills which bounded the landscape, and framed it in gorgeous splendour, a semi-circle of purple and gold.

With a heart too full for words, Mary gazed for the last time, as Mary Trevylian, upon the familiar scene, *his* inheritance once more, from the entrance door

of the grand old Hall, of which she was the next day to be made the mistress.

She had a self-imposed duty to perform that evening, a duty which she had resolved upon performing alone. Mr. Baynard had been to town on business, and was not expected until late.

“Let old Senator be sent to meet you,” Mary whispered, when he had bidden her “good-bye,” under happier auspices than the time before. “I never shall forget hearing the colt stride past the Rectory that night—never,” she added with a shudder, “it was the presage of evil to come.”

“And of evil averted, thanks to you,” her intended husband replied, kissing her fair upturned forehead, and then with a sudden impulse snatching her to his heart. “God will reward your faithful love, I never can.”

“Hush, John! it is but a selfish love after all, for it is a part of my own being,” and then with blushing cheeks and downcast eyes, Mary Trevylian told him of the determination which she had made, to profit so far by his absence from home for the next few days, as to be constantly with the pale gentle lady who had been twenty years on the road “home.”

“She must go home on our wedding day. I do not dread the effect of the meeting for the dear old man, it will scarcely surprise him, John; he is much changed, as you must have perceived, since your illness—we should never have been able to keep things from him as we have done, else—he always talks of Mabel as though he knew that she was alive, and I believe now that it is *given to him* to know—the only difficulty will be with her.”

“You will overcome it, if it is to be

overcome," Mary's intended husband answered proudly. "You divine every thought of my mind, darling. If you ever accomplish this meeting, you will have been the means of realizing the fondest hope I have upon earth, but one."

The old joyous look, and light hearted *bonhomme* had died out of the eyes, that had known tears of such bitter source, as we have seen blotting the fair page of his early youth, but a serener happiness shone in their stead, in the deep set grey orbs of the reinstated heir.

The *éclat* of the discovery of the King's Baynard mystery, so curiously interwoven with that attending the families of Vava-sour and Trevylian, and the turmoil of tongues attending it, had died away. Steps had been taken by Mr. Baynard and his friends to establish his legitimacy beyond a doubt, which it would only weary the reader to enter into at large.

Suffice it to say that the whole county rejoiced in the refutation of the slander, which had so nearly broken the heart of the true heir, and which would, if uncom-bated, have consigned his noble inheri-tance into the keeping of a profligate valet and an intriguing attorney, whose hopes had been raised to the highest pitch by the dangerous illness of Mr. Baynard, when a blow was dealt suddenly from an unexpected quarter, which shattered the superstructure of villany, built upon the foundation of the mystery attaching to Mabel Trevelylian's flight from King's Baynard, and the secrecy which had been maintained as to her subsequent fate.

Poetical justice would demand a fitting end to the career of these men; but, even to point a moral, the pen of the author dares not in this instance deviate from the strict path of truth. Mr. Nathaniel Lines flourished for many years, with the

somewhat equivocal verdure of that bay-tree supplied by the poet (who saw deep into the mysteries of God's providence here on earth) as an apt representation of the prosperity attending the lot of the wicked man below.

Elminster, indeed, would have none of him, and the well-known white hat performed feats of ubiquity in its streets no more. But Quill-driver and his master sought climes, the moral atmosphere of which was found better suited to the tainted moral condition of the attorney's character, and in which the shrewd practitioner was known, as he had once been known before, as "a sharp fellow" and a "knowing dog," although none went so far as to pronounce him, under any circumstances, "a safe man."

His long, lean figure, and hatchet-like face were almost as well known as the master's at the meets of the "Marl Valley"

hounds ; but it had been once observed that upon the appearance of a stalwart though elderly horseman amongst the field on a certain occasion, the gaunt horse and his rider had disappeared mysteriously, just as the hounds were about to draw the best cover of a far-famed preserve.

“ Glad to see you out with the ‘ Marl Valley ’ again, Squire,” the huntsman said, touching his hat.

“ Where are you stopping, Town-Eden ? ” enquired the elderly master, offering an outstretched hand.

“ Where is that rascal gone ? ” was the excited exclamation of the gentleman so addressed, as he gazed eagerly among the horsemen for a weasel-like figure, upon which his eyes had rested for a moment, and which seemed to have melted into thin air beneath their withering gaze.

“ Did you see Nat Lines, papa ? ”

asked a beautiful woman, well mounted, as she cantered up to her father's side. "I did, and it gave me a turn."

The Squire's reply to his fair daughter—then Lady Silvermere, but once our old acquaintance, Maggie Town-Eden—was more forcible than polite, and Mr. Nathaniel Lines had no reason to bless the day when, as a newly-married wife, she was transplanted into the same neighbourhood as that which he had singled out for his new professional career.

It might have turned out fatal to his prospects, but for a letter received by the young Countess from her friend, Lady Baynard, a few days after, in which she said, "As for the 'viper,' as you call him, Maggie, leave him alone. *I am too happy, we are too happy, to see any beauty in revenge. John is looking over my shoulder, and adds, 'Well said, Mary. I owe him some amends, for I once laid my*

hands on him in anger, and he was lame. Tell Margaret for my sake to leave him alone.' ”

So this was the poetical justice that fell to the share of Mr. Nathaniel Lines. As for the “ Co.,” represented by Mr. Luke Grimstone and the unhappy woman who still styled herself Lady Baynard, all that is known to the self-appointed historian of the family fortunes, is that the former disappeared suddenly one fine morning in July, upon the receipt of a letter from England, after having drawn cheques to the amount of several thousands on the family banker in Paris, who had no hesitation in honouring the well-known signature.

The wretched Carlotta clung, harpy-like, to the dying man until he breathed his last, with her eye upon the personalities and gorgeous surroundings, which she was prepared to remove to a place

of safe retreat the moment the breath was out of the body of her terrible lord.

It was whispered in the establishment, consisting entirely of foreign servants, since the flight of the English valet, that the Signora was in possession of a prescription of the same tranquillising nature, as that which had once been sent to Mrs. Grimstone for the benefit of the unfortunate Mabel.

However that might have been, the last of the wicked baronets was found dead in his bed one morning, with the Nemesis of the twenty years of her living death, looking out of his unclosed, terror-striking eyes.

Drawing a veil over the subsequent fate of the abandoned mother, I will only say here, that her faults and the wickedness of his father, were not allowed to drag down to infamy the life of the beau-

tiful child, on whose account so much wrong had been wrought.

It was not in the nature of Sir John Baynard to forget a kindness he had experienced, even at the hands of a little child. He had him removed by means of bribes, and even of threats, from the evil influences which had surrounded his cradle, and, during the happy schoolboy era of his own sons, no merrier laugh, or more joyous step awoke the echoes of the old Hall, than that of the little Marmaduke, who had no right to the name of Baynard, but who was not on that account cast off by the generous-hearted brother, who had once taken him so fondly in his arms.

When, but a few years later, the boy was attacked with a fatal malady, which only added new lustre to the wonderful southern eyes, which, like Ninon, he had inherited from his mother, it was Mary's own hand

that nursed and tended him, and it was in her arms that he sighed away his last breath, with the dulcet "*madre mia*" on his dying lips.

It was thus that she and her husband revenged themselves for the wrongs done to them in the days of their early youth.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Though fools spurn Hymen's gentle powers,
 We who improve his golden hours,
 By sweet experience know,
 That marriage rightly understood,
 Gives to the tender and the good,
 A Paradise below."—COTTON.

WE left Mary Trevelyian on the eve of her marriage day, standing on the threshold of the old Hall, contemplating the beauty of the landscape, and engaged in an inward conflict with her own reluctance to try, for the last time, her powers of persuasion in a quarter which had hitherto resisted her manifold winning wiles.

Lady Baynard had not yet consented

to the proposed interview with the aged Rector on Mary's wedding-day. This was the more remarkable, as in most respects poor Mabel was as docile as a child, in the hands of those that loved her. The wan, wasted light of her intellect, which had faded rather than decayed, seemed to revive under the influence of her son's devoted duty, and of Mary's untiring love.

"I will go! I will go! you shall take me to him!" she would say one moment, weeping tears in streams on such an appeal being made to her, as Mary had made many times during the last few days; but the next moment she would as absolutely refuse, and with the incontinence of a mind unhinged, would relapse into an impracticable mood.

Since, however, she had thrown her arms round the son of her youth, and

felt in return the strong pressure of his protecting grasp, she had never uttered the mournful cry, which had so often fallen upon his ear during his lonely life at King's Baynard, "Ah! Sir Mark! Sir Mark!" She had gone back in imagination to the days of her early youth, and out of her still beautiful face had faded the expression of terror, which had at first been so painfully evident.

Her abundant hair, of a rich golden brown, like Mary's, was guiltless of a silver thread, and when it was carefully arranged by loving hands in soft, matronly braids, and her dress of rich silk accomodated to the fashion of the day, few would have believed that nearly half a century had passed over her head, or that the alabaster fairness of her skin was the result of twenty years spent in the little closet within the state chamber, in

forced seclusion, under a roof that was really her own.

Few either would have thought, that to that gentle-looking lady could ever have been applied the mournful word "insane," especially in those days, when there was no acknowledged difference between a dangerous maniac and the victim of a harmless delusion; and when any one afflicted with an hallucination on one point, was found guilty of all, and received in his or her own person the terrible verdict of society, "mad."

"I am afraid," Lady Baynard muttered softly, and as it were to herself, although the words were in answer to the fervent entreaty of her son's promised bride, who knelt at her feet, and looked up into her far-away eyes, "I am afraid; my father can be stern when he chooses. I have deeply offended, and he has cast me off. He would not know me now,

I am not like the Mabel who was so vain and so wayward long ago. I am a poor faded woman, whose heart her husband broke. I had better not go home again now."

"Whose heart her husband broke!"

Had the words any bitter, prophetic meaning for another bride of the house so long accursed, now kneeling, weeping at that sad, broken woman's feet, once a creature as bright and as beautiful as herself?

Not so; Mary's grief had no selfish source, her tears were in this instance flowing "for others' ills," and she soon conquered her own emotion to say,

"Shall I tell you what the father you have offended is like now? He is an old man, very feeble, and sometimes very sad; for he still thinks of his daughter Mabel, although he mourns her as dead. His 'beautiful Mabel,' he calls her, who

was lost so long ago. And he stretches out his failing hands, as if he were feeling for her, and says, 'If I could only bless her, my Mabel, my darling, only once before I go!' He does not know, you see, that she is so near him, and will not go to him, or I think that his heart would break."

"You have conquered again, Mary," said a familiar voice at her side, whose rich ringing accents ever became full of tender meaning when it addressed her; and as the mother threw herself sobbing into the arms of her son, and cried as she did so, "You shall take me home to-morrow," those two fond and faithful hearts experienced as keen a sensation of happiness as they ever experienced in that time, which to some is mere *existence*, but which to them was about to prove a throbbing and abundant *life*.

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“Put up the window, Meredith, that I may hear the bells.”

“It is not Meredith, dear Sir; but I will put up the window, that we may both hear the bells,” said a gentle voice at the old man’s side, on Mary Trevylian’s wedding morning; and Mrs. Vavasour in soft white robes, and with her luxuriant hair released for that one morning from the confinement of her widow’s cap, came forward, and took the frail failing hand tenderly between both her own.

“Thank you, my dear lady, thank you,” said the aged Rector. “You are very good to me, all of you; but Meredith should not have gone out, and left me a burden upon you. I am ashamed to give so much trouble.”

“It is no trouble; and I am responsible for Meredith’s short-comings, so it is only fair that her duties should devolve upon me; for I sent her out, and promised

to take care of you the meanwhile."

"You are very good, very kind," he replied, "to think of us all to-day," as with the delicacy of feeling which the feebleness and decay of age could not extinguish, he touched with his hand the snowy fabric of Mrs. Vavasour's dress, which had the effect of making the young widow look like a newly made bride herself. "Mabel will be so glad."

Mrs. Vavasour started at the sound of the name, now so familiar to those in constant attendance upon the old man, that they had almost ceased to observe when he substituted it for the one belonging to his niece Mary.

"Indeed she will;" she recovered presence of mind enough to say as she turned away her head to conceal the tears which were flowing fast down her cheeks.

"I have seen our darling, you know, and helped to dress her. I need not ask

you if you approved the result?" she added, when she had recovered her composure, which it required an effort to accomplish, for it was a trying day for the young widow, whose "dead rival," as she had once called her, was on the way home, to which she had been on the road for more than twenty years.

The woman who had once made such havoc in *his* heart; the woman to whom tardy justice had been rendered by *his* hand; the woman who had been brought to see, through a vista of suffering, the nobility of the nature which she had rejected and despised in the blind folly of her wayward youth, and who had referred the magistrates to him in confirmation of the fact of her marriage, in the words, "Henry Vavasour saw me married; he looked white enough, God knows! Poor Harry, I used him very ill."

If some such thoughts were following

one another in rapid succession through Mrs. Vavasour's mind, they were dispelled by the sound of Mr. Trevylian's voice, raised in the shrill treble peculiar to age, as the sound of carriage wheels was heard rapidly approaching the house.

"What is that?" he said. "Who can be coming here now? They are all in church, are they not?"

Who can tell what dim visions of an angry father, in the guise of the wicked baronet of former times, driving post to put an end to a marriage which he disapproved, might not have floated in the imagination, to which the things of time were beginning to melt and merge, like the impalpable essence of a vanishing dream?

"It is only my carriage with some of my people in it, come to see the wedding, I daresay," answered Mrs. Vavasour to the old man's startled remarks, but in

spite of the carelessness of her words, her cheek grew white as the carriage passed the door and went round to the back entrance; for she was well aware who the occupant of the carriage was, and that this was the return of the long lost daughter to the home of her youth, escorted by the faithful old servant who had held her in her arms as a child.

There was silence maintained in the room for a minute or two, and Mrs. Vavasour thought she heard the old man mutter some words which she could not distinctly hear. Then she was conscious that he had dropped something, and that he was trying to recover it without disturbing her—evidently some treasure extracted from the Indian cabinet, which on that auspicious morning he had had once more placed at his hand.

“Let me help you,” she said, advancing to pick up a little yellow paper packet tied

with a silken ribbon, upon which was traced in delicate characters the inscription we have seen once before, "*Baby's hair*," and as she placed it reverently in his outstretched hand, the last spark of resentment towards the rival who had risen, as it were, from the grave to confront her, died out of her heart, and left no sign that it had ever been there.

The "waxen touches" of the little one, who was now to her, her all in all, pressed it for ever "from the mother's breast."

"Thank you, dear lady, thank you," said Mr. Trevelyian, weeping the painless tears of extreme age. "I had a daughter once, you know, and she died without my blessing. Poor Mabel! I never heard your wedding bells, my dear; but if I could have looked upon your face again, I would have died happy, for the curse is lifted to-day; I have lived for it, and I

have prayed for it, and it has come to pass; but for that other prayer, I shall pass away, and it will not be answered—Thy will be done, oh! my God.”

As the head of the venerable man sank upon his breast, after giving utterance to the solemn words, Mrs. Vavasour believed, for a moment, that he was dying; but as with a loud alarum of joy and triumph the bells rang out from the ivied tower of the old church and told their own story, he raised it again, with an expression of serenity that was almost joy, and seemed to drink in the sounds which he had so often prayed that he might be spared to hear.

“I have lived to see them man and wife,” he said, ““ Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,’ the evil days are accomplished, and the curse is lifted from their heads like a cloud.”

It was, indeed, (as their after experience

proved) lifted like a cloud from the two beautiful heads, on which the sun streamed down in mellowed glory through the window, "richly light," of the old church of King's Baynard.

It was on the heads of Sir John and Lady Baynard that it fell on that fair September morning, for, on the dawn of the day on which "young John" and Mary Trevylian became man and wife, Sir Marmaduke Baynard, the last of the wicked baronets, breathed his last.

Never had a more noble couple passed down that venerable aisle, never had the bride and bridegroom been more generally loved and respected, and, quiet as the wedding was with regard to rich and titled guests, never had a more heartfelt ovation been paid to the worth of a married pair, than that which greeted them in ringing cheers as they passed through serried ranks of tenants and

dependants who showered blessings and good wishes on their happy heads.

“God bless them ! Long live the bride and bridegroom ! Long live Mr. and Mrs. Baynard !” were the cries that rang upon the sharp crisp morning air, as the fair young bride, smiling through the April tears which clung to her long lashes, and which veiled her hazel-grey eyes in a mist of splendour, walked through the midst of them back to the Rectory home, which was only about two hundred yards away from the church.

The “Squire” had given Mary away; Margaret Town-Eden was her only bridesmaid, and she looked so bright, so handsome, so calmly self-possessed, even when the young bridegroom, according to the fashion of that day, pressed his lips in due reverence on her fair cheek, that Mary herself began to doubt whether it was true, that Margaret had once, as she

had owned to her mother, in a moment of confidence, wrung from her by the news of his illness, deceived herself as to his affection, to her own hurt.

As they passed over the threshold of the home under the roof of which Mary had lived, as it seemed to her, a lifetime of joy, and a lifetime of sorrow, her heart almost ceased to beat, and her eyes clouded over this time with a mist of fear.

There were no guests to entertain, or watch with curious eyes the blushes and the tears of the newly-made bride. Aunt Dorothy, Mrs. Vavasour, the Squire and Margaret Town-Eden, the warm friends that had fallen to her somewhat isolated lot, were too dear, and too near to her, to do otherwise than soothe by their presence; and she had need of some such support, for her brave young spirit had undertaken to perform a task that day which it would

require the full strength of her loving heart, itself agitated with contending emotions, to carry out.

She pressed her husband's arm, in answer to his anxious enquiry whether she was strong enough to go through with her self-imposed duty, and not trusting herself to speak in reply, she bent forward for a moment, to invite an encouraging caress, and then went slowly on, in the direction of her Uncle's room. It had been arranged that she should see him first alone, and Mrs. Vavasour had taken the opportunity of leaving him to himself, when the loud clang of the church bells proclaimed that the bride and bridegroom had left the church.

As Mary stole in in her white floating robes, and with an expression of solemnity in her innocent girl face, the old man looked up and smiled; and when with a soft flutter, like the rustle of a dove's

wing, she sank on her knees and begged his blessing, with a faltering voice, he placed his two hands upon her head, and said, "God bless you, Mabel, my child!"

"It is a sign," she muttered softly to herself, "a sign from Heaven;" and with a sudden impulse, she flung her arms about him, and said with her flushed cheek resting upon his forehead, on which the white hair lay in a thin circle of silver, the glory of a venerable age, "Mabel, your child, is waiting for your blessing—she is still alive; she is *his* mother, Sir Marmaduke Baynard's deserted wife. Your 'dear lad,' my husband, is your grandson; but you cannot love him better than you do. You will see him and bless him, as you have blessed me; and his mother, *your Mabel*, will come to you on his dear arm. You will bless her, for his sake, for he loves

her very dearly. A newly-found mother is a prize for a heart like his. They are waiting, Uncle—what shall I say ?”

As she looked into his face for an answer, there was a glory in it, which was not of this earth ; and he answered her solemnly, “God has answered the prayer of my life. I could never think of Mabel as dead. I shall see her and bless her before I die. God bless Mabel, my lost child !”

As the mouth of the wicked baronet had been sealed with a curse, so that of the venerable Rector of King’s Baynard closed with a blessing. He never spoke again ; he was carried from his chair to his bed, on the bright September morning which had dawned upon the realization of his fondest hopes, and as his lost daughter knelt at his side, and herself placed the wandering purposeless hand upon her bowed head, there came back

to her, as in a flood, the memories of her happy youth; and Mabel, Lady Baynard, recovered under their influence her wandering wits, which had been so cruelly numbed by the biting blast of the Baynard curse.

She lived for many years an honoured mother and grandmother in that well governed house; and when, at last, she was laid reverently at the side of him, whose blessing she had lived to receive, to her memory, her devoted children raised a marble monument, on which was inscribed according to the wish expressed by her dying lips, the two short words—"Taken home."

Sir John and Lady Baynard, in the moontide of their happiness and prosperity, would often visit the "Standard Oak," and recall the interview which had once taken place under its venerable shade. On these occasions, Talbot, the old

hound was their sole companion. The bright-haired, sunny-faced children, who in time roused the slumbering echoes of the Hall, never accompanied them there.

The youngest and spoilt darling of the family once found in a drawer, by chance left open in her father's study, (or library, as it had been called of old) a faded blue rosette, with which she toddled with much gravity to her proud young mother, who pinned it conspicuously on the breast of her frock.

"Look Daddy," she said to her father, as he entered the room at the moment, and stretched out his arms to the darling child who was the image of the wife he adored. "Look what Mabel found in 'oo drawer."

The colour suddenly forsook the face of Sir John Baynard, as he recognised, at a glance, the faded breast knot which Mary Trevylian had dropped at the Inn where the

bitter farewell had been said, which might, but for God's merciful Providence, have parted two loving hearts for ever in this world.

"Mabel must not have that," he gravely said, as he detached the relic from the little frock, to which the mother had pinned it. "It was the sight of that blue ribbon, Mary," he added, turning to his wife who looked on in surprise at the episode, "which once saved me from a great crime. I will never part with that, while I live."

THE END.

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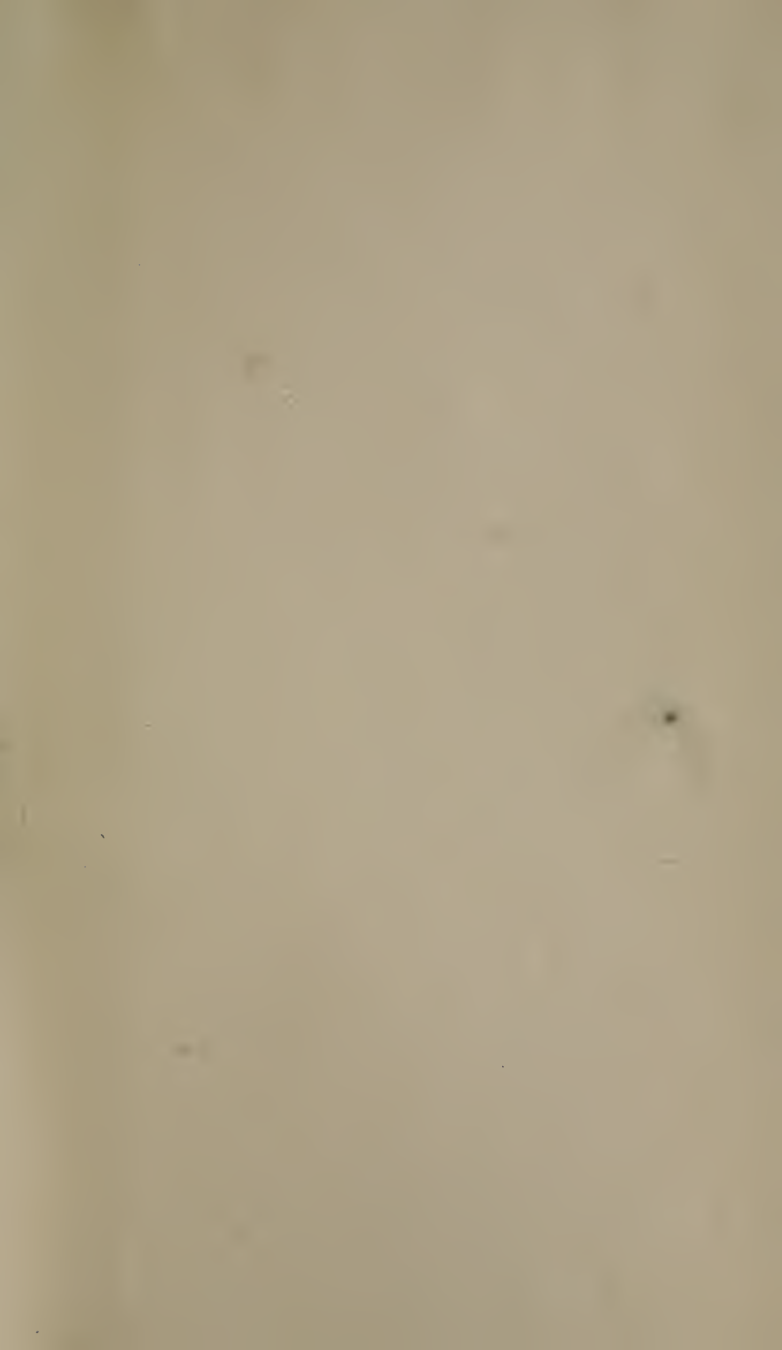
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